

While You Are Touring...

Spend Extra Time Enjoying Hamilton County as You Tour the Mills Scenic Drive!

Family Fun Is Here
Hamilton County ~ Iowa
You Should Be Too!

Eats & Dining

Ellsworth Stanhope
Jewell Stratford
Kamrar Williams - off of I-35
 Webster City

Lodging

The Cabins of Hamilton County at
Little Wall Lake & Briggs Woods Park
Motels in rural Williams - right off of I-35
Motels in Webster City

Camping

City Parks - Stratford City Park
County Parks
Bell's Mill a Briggs Woods a Little Wall Lake

Shopping

Seasonal Farmers Markets in Jewell & Webster City
Vintage, Salvaged, Consignment & Repurposed Shops in Ellsworth, Jewell, Kamrar & Webster City
Soap & Gift Shops in Jewell, Stratford & Williams
Quilt & Fabric Stores in Jewell & rural Ellsworth
Rock Shop in Stratford
Hardware Stores in Jewell & Webster City
Equine & Animal Supply Store in Stratford & Webster City
Clothing Stores in Webster City
Sportswear Store in Webster City
School Spirit Stores in Jewell & Webster City
Bakeries & Donut Shops in Kamrar & Webster City
Flower Shops in Webster City
Gardening Shops in Stanhope & Webster City
Winery in rural Stratford
Grocery Stores in Jewell, Stratford and Webster City
Coffee shops in Jewell & Webster City



Come visit the
Hamilton County Freedom Rock
located in Stratford!

Brochure Sponsored By:
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WORKFORCE & BUSINESS ENRICHMENT
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Blairsburg | Ellsworth | Jewell | Kamrar | Randall
Stanhope | Stratford | Webster City | Williams



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A Scenic Drive

Celebrating Our Heritage
Rich in Tradition
Rooted in History

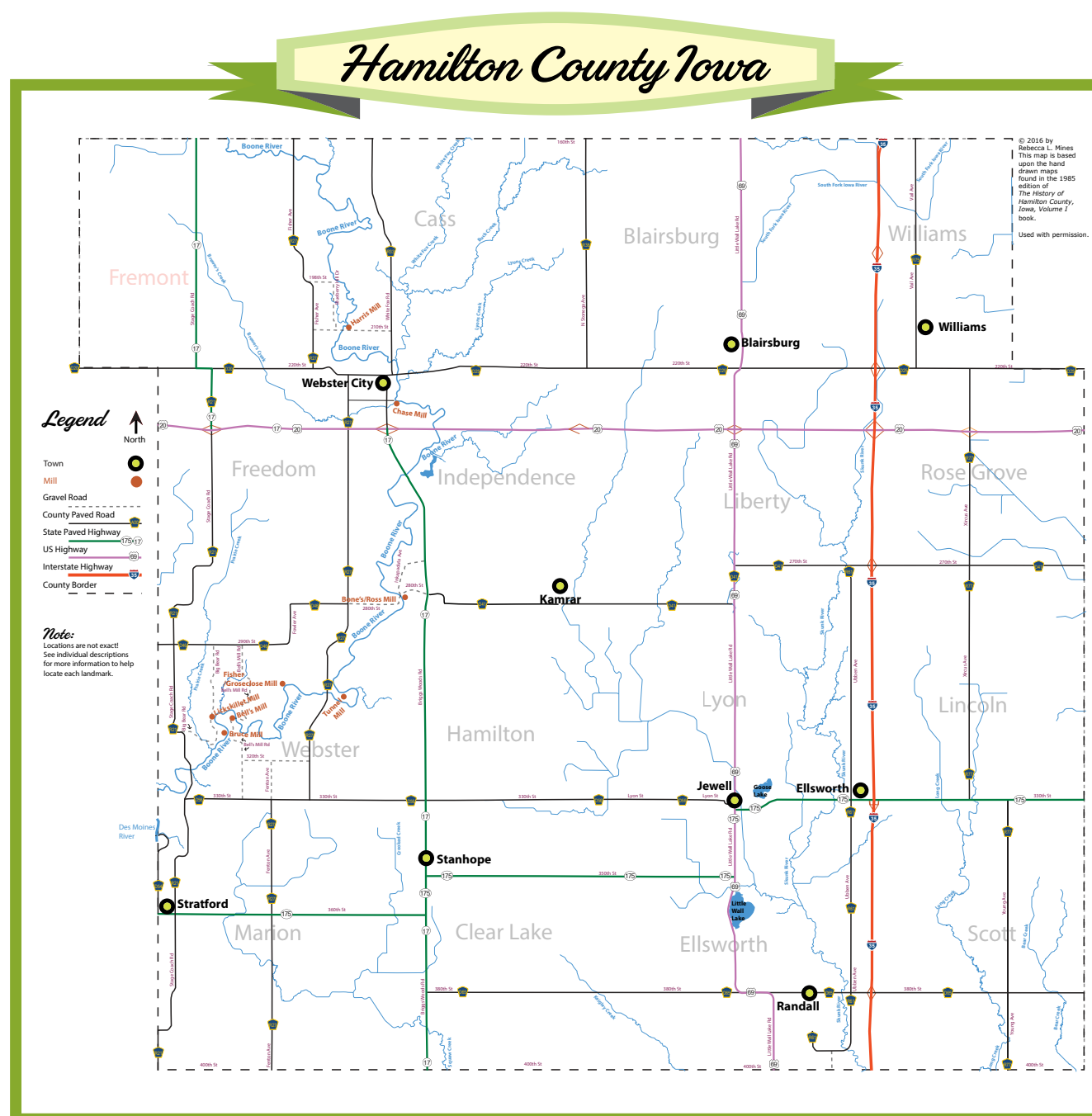


= Hamilton County, Iowa =

Mills

MILLS

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HAMILTON COUNTY DEVELOPMENT
WORKFORCE & BUSINESS ENRICHMENT



The Water Mills on the Boone River

Shelter and food were the vital requirements of pioneer life. The settlers needed lumber for a dwelling and bread for their tables. Therefore, the major business of that time was the saw mill and the grist mill. The corn was ground into corn meal from which could be made "samp" and cornbread. SAMP was a porridge-like meal. Burrs added later to each mill provided the flour that was essential to the pioneer meals.

The Boone River was the best mill stream in Hamilton County. As many as 17 mills have existed along the Boone River during our early history.

Three kinds of water powered mills were used on the Boone River. The most common of our mills were the turbine, which was a horizontal wheel with water pouring down into the wheel from the center. The overshot wheel, where water passed over the top of the vertical wheel. The undershot, where the water passed under the vertical wheel. All of the Boone River mills were turbine mills except Bone's Mill and Chase's Mill. They operated as double turbine mills. Eckert's Mill was the only overshot mill in our county.

The mill served as a gathering place to exchange news and gossip. Several of the mills had small stores and some served as official post offices. Efficiency destroyed the water mills, silencing the musical hum of the wheels forever. The last operating mill on the river was the Chase Mill in Webster City. It stood empty until 1900 when it was torn down.

The Mill Tour

The mill tour of Hamilton County will focus on four of the 17 mills, that at one time or another, were operated on the Boone River and were located from one mile north of Webster City to the point where the Boone River empties into the Des Moines River. These four major mills are Chase Mill, Bone's Mill, Tunnel Mill, and Bell's Mill. The Mill Tour route is circular and will take about an hour from start to finish.

Chase Mill

The tour begins at Chase Mill in Webster City. This site is located at the east end of Ohio Street. The first mill in the Webster City area was built in 1855 by Walter C. Willson, and his brother, Sumler. The Willson brothers water powered saw mill produced about 8,000 board feet of lumber every 24 hours.

In 1856 the mill was sold to Charles Stoddard and W. S. Pray, who added a planing mill and a furniture factory just north of the mill. During this time, a corn cracker was installed and J. D. Sketchley was hired to operate it. The settlers were pleased with this addition and brought their hand-shelled corn to the mill. The corn cracker quickened the process of making hominy. Corn meal also provided for "samp," which was a corn meal mush.

John Hill bought the mill from Stoddard and Pray on April 8, 1868. Hill was a fine millwright who proceeded to build an entirely modern mill on the same site. He produced an excellent quality of flour. Judge D. D. Chase purchased a half-interest in the mill in 1873. Hill sold the other half to Chase four years later. Charles Closs rented the mill from Chase in 1882 and operated it for three years.

Frank G. Stearns operated the mill beginning in 1890. The mill had two large stone burrs and several silk reel sets for screening the flour. At that time mostly rye and buckwheat were milled. Stearns developed a large grist trade and in 1893 he built the Cream Roller Mills near the Crooked Creek Railroad Depot, producing the F. G. Stearns and Son's Plansifter Flour. The Chase mill was abandoned when Stearns established his own business.

The Chicago & Northwestern Railroad came to Webster City on December 6, 1880. The railroad tracks separated the mill from town. Judge Chase sued the railroad for damages in the amount of \$1,500 because the trains frightened the horses, causing a decline in trade. He won the lawsuit.

Pioneers told of standing at the intersection of Bank and Superior Streets and being able to see the four-story water mill. No houses or trees blocked their view in the 1870's. The Chase Mill dam backed up the water to form a small lake where boating and fishing took place. During the winter, the Artesian Ice Company cut blocks of ice from the mill-pond, packed them in sawdust and stored them in the icehouses near the mill until summer came.

For years the Chase Mill was a landmark, being the last of the 17 mills along the Boone River to remain standing. The mill site was offered to the city to be used as a park, but the offer was declined by the city council. The mill was then torn down.

Today, nothing remains of the mill, that was located, where today's Ohio Street (if extended) would intersect the river, the dam or the furniture factory except a few large limestone foundation blocks in the riverbank. A few of the logs and rocks can be clearly seen when the water level is extremely low.

Bone's Mill

From here, you drive south on Highway 17 about six miles to 280th Street. Turn west on gravel and follow the road down to the Boone River. You will see a sign post informing you that the Bone's Mill was located here. The mill was located at the south side of the east end of the current Bever Bridge.

The site of Bone's Mill was near where Wilson Brewer and four other related families decided to stop for the winter in 1850. Brewer referred to the area as Hope Hollow. During this winter Brewer searched out a site to settle his family. He built his first cabin in what is now Webster City, and moved his family into the cabin in the spring of 1851.

Thomas Williams recorded the first official land entry of Hamilton County at Hope Hollow on June 25, 1853. In 1854 Williams built a saw mill about 200 yards upstream from the Bone's Mill site. This proved to be a poor location when the mill and dam were destroyed

by ice and floods the following spring. Williams moved his machinery from this site and began building a new mill.

Three years later, Lambert Sternberg bought the property and put in a new dam and added machinery for grinding wheat. During this period the usual pay for a miller was every sixth bushel of wheat. This was called the "miller's toll."

Sternberg sold the mill to Jay Sternberg in 1863. Jay Sternberg built the mill house at the close of the Civil War in 1865. This house is standing today. It contains many features from its pioneer heritage. The basement walls are 18 to 24 inches thick and are of native limestone. The native black walnut sills were peg-drilled together. The heavy beams are of oak, the paneling of weathered barn boards, and the fireplace is of river rock.

John Ross acquired the property in 1868. A tragedy occurred at the mill in the summer of 1869 when the body of Ross was found in the wheel pit with a bullet wound in the back. Ross had his 18-year-old nephew staying with him for the summer. He came from Chicago and was unhappy with the quiet, but hard life of the miller.

The nephew asked his uncle for money to go back to Chicago after he noticed the purse the uncle carried that contained about \$500, which he was saving for payment on the mill. Young Ross was found later that day returning from Webster City. He had \$20 in his pocket, which he explained was given to him by a stranger at the train depot. He had blood on his clothes, which he explained he got when he helped butcher a hog. The nephew was accused of the murder.

His trial was the first murder trial held at the 1866 courthouse, then located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Seneca and Bank Streets in Webster City. The jury acquitted the young Ross and the murder remains unsolved.

Following the death of John Ross, the mill property was transferred back to Jay Sternberg, who sold it to James Kimbell in 1870. Joseph Bone became the owner of the mill in 1871, and he was the best known of all the millers on the Boone River.

He made extensive improvements to make it the largest flour mill on the river at that time. The location of the mill was on the east bank of the river, just south of where Bever's Bridge now is located. In 1880, the mill was named "Excelsior" to eliminate the confusion that arose from having two operating mills, both named Bone's Mill.

By this time, Bone had purchased what is now Bell's Mill. Adam McKinlay, the grandfather of MacKinlay Kantor, was Joseph Bone's miller so the company name until 1899 was Bone and McKinlay. Today the mill is best known as Bone's Mill.

P. G. LeBarr purchased the mill and ran it from 1889 to 1895. When the mill was purchased by P. B. Osborne, he modernized it by adding a steam boiler so it could operate when the water flow was low. The mill was destroyed when the boiler exploded in 1899 and was abandoned forever.

Tunnel Mill

Continue across the bridge and up the hill to the west. Continue for a distance of about a mile and a quarter where you will intersect the Tunnel Mill Road. Turn left (south) and travel about a mile until you come to a short street, 301st Street. This street leads to the site of Tunnel Mill, one of the most famous of all the Hamilton County mills. This street is a dead end so it will be necessary for you to turn around and return to Tunnel Mill Road, where you will turn south and up a steep grade.

Robert Watson dug a tunnel 400 feet through a glacial mound in the horseshoe bend in the Boone River. It was an engineering marvel.

Working only with a pocket compass and a level, he worked from each end of the tunnel. He missed the connection in the center by less than 18 inches. The tunnel was three feet high and two feet nine inches wide. A gate was constructed at the north end to control the flow of water through the tunnel to drive the mill wheel. The tunnel's walls were lined with 3-inch planks of oak and walnut posts were in-stalled to hold up a four-inch plank at the top.

The fall in the river bend was six and a half feet; the dam was four and a half feet. With this tunnel, Watson gained an eleven-foot head of water, which gave tremendous power for the mill.

At first the mill was used as a saw mill, but later a corn grinder was added. Lyman Perry bought the mill from Watson in 1867 and his brother, Gilbert, joined him in partnership in 1870. Wheat grinding was added in

1871. This mill was financially the most successful of all mills on the Boone River.

Each spring sections of the dam were damaged and had to be repaired. The dam was constructed of hardwood logs and large boulders. The upstream ends of the logs were laid lower than the downstream ends, so that when the ice went out it would slide up and over the dam without destroying it.

Large areas of the dam were always in need of repair. The tunnel needed constant repair also, as the water rotted out the boards. On April 14, 1889, the tunnel caved in. The Perry brothers relined it and work at the mill resumed.

On November 14, 1889, after grinding buckwheat for three weeks steady, the mill was forced to shut down at 7:00 p.m. due to a hot box (an overheating bearing). At 2:00 a.m. the next morning the Perry brothers were awakened by their neighbors who rushed to the mill to report the fire and assist. The mill was completely destroyed. No insurance was carried on the mill and it was never rebuilt.

Bell's Mill

Continue traveling south about three miles until you intersect 330th Street. Here you are to turn west and travel until you intersect with Bell's Mill Road. Continue traveling north on Bell's Mill Road and down the hill on a curvy road. Just as you cross the river (now heading east) you will find the Bell's Mill Park on the south side of the road. Turn into the park and examine the river, a cabin, a country school house, and a mill wheel.

Bell's Mill was built in 1853 by David Eckerson, a Methodist preacher. It was run by a wooden overshot style water wheel that ground wheat and buckwheat. In 1867, the mill was purchased, rebuilt, and operated by Joseph Bone. He installed twin turbines, one of which is displayed at Bell's Mill Park and the other in Wilson Brewer Park in Webster City.

Alanson Bryan bought a half-interest in the mill two years later. Business was prosperous and Bone built a new home on the hill above the mill. In 1873, Bone sold his interest in the mill to John Atherton. Byran sold his half-interest to the Bell family in 1875. In 1878, Atherton sold his half-interest to Benjamin Bell and son, John. Jasper Bell bought the mill in 1880 and ran it successfully for eight years.

On the night of March 2, 1888, Benjamin Bell died and before morning a flood had carried away the dam, stopping the wheels of the mill forever. As you stand on the concrete bridge at the park, the dam was on the south side, upstream and the mill was on the west bank of the river on the north, downstream side.

In memory of the pioneers who settled this area, the Bell family donated eight acres, including the mill site, to the county to be used as a park.

Bell's Mill Park offers facilities to picnic, camp, and fish. The park includes a shelter house, the Marion Center School (moved to the park from its location seven miles away) and an old log cabin.

The cabin was built in 1867 by Charles Smith about four miles northeast of the Boone River mouth. This was donated to the park by the Lynde-Quinn families in 1937.

Completing the Mill Tour

Continue traveling north about a half mile and you will intersect with 290th Street. Turn right (east) and drive on the hard surfaced road about a mile and a half to intersect with Tunnel Mill Road. This road will cause you to turn north on a curve and continue into Webster City. Traveling north for about five miles will bring you back into Webster City on Beach Street. Continue north until you pass Graceland Cemetery and turn back east on Ohio Street. Continue traveling east on Ohio Street until you intersect with the Boone. Now you are back to the start of the tour!



Pictured above is a sketch of Tunnel Mill.

Pictured on the front cover is Chase Mill.