OLD GRIST MILL AT

DEKORRA IS REBUILT.

PORTAGE, Wis., Dec. 2.—Columbia county has the distinction of having one of the first grist mills that was established in this section of the country. The old mill was situated near the Wisconsin river in the town of Dekorra, seven miles south of this city, on Rocky Run creek. The mill was built in 1843 and as near as can be ascertained there was no mill at the time in Madison, Baraboo, Wyoconda, Kingston or Columbus. Grist was brought to this mill from a distance of thirty to forty miles above this city. It often took several days before a grist could be ground and each patron would have to wait his turn.

Daddy Robertson of Caledonia, brother of David Robertson, Sr., of Lodi, was the first to have grist ground in the mill. Previous to this time many of the pioneers took their grist even as far as Milwaukee to have it ground.

The mill was built by a company of men from Ohio who had large land interests in the state and who were the platters of the ancient and obsolete village of Dekorra. The mill was leased in 1847 to Joshua Rhodes and John Springer who afterward gave possession to I. I. Ege. In 1852 S. M. Carr traded his farm in Ohio for the property and they sold it to John MacKenzie who operated the mill many years and up to the time of his death. The present structure occupies the same site that the old mill was located upon and large portions of the old structure are built within.
Town Vanished
With the
Lumber Rafts

A Little Old Lady Weaving Rugs
Is the Last Inhabitant of Dekorra,
Once a Thriving Wisconsin River Town

It was rafting on the river that made Dekorra, for in those days an endless procession of lumber rafts passed down the river. Often the boats tied up at the Dekorra landing and ox teams hauled the lumber to inland points. Other boats slipped by the village with only a house whistled greeting as they lay to. St. Louis.

BACK in 1832 Thompson, Trimble & Morton became the owners of the section of land which was to become the first Kentucky city, then Dekorra, and today a moldering ruin. Soon afterward Lafayette Hill chose the spot for a home and in 1857 J. W. Rhodes and Thomas Nelson, in the employ of Thompson & Trimble platted that village and began the erection of a mill.

At that time there were no mills at Barnboo, Portage, Madison or Columbus. Grain was brought from 40 miles around and business grew until the time came when 250 barrels of flour were ground in one day.

To the first building a large stone storage room was added and in an effort to make it ratproof a solid wall of grain and rock seven inches thick was built. Of the early mill only a part of this storage house wall remains.
In the olden days when the village hummed with activity, hundreds of grateful visitors found comfort and bounteous hospitality at the old hill inn.

In 1832 S. M. Carr traded his farm in Ohio for the hill without ever seeing it. After some improvements he sold it in April, 1839, to John McKenzie for $9,000. At this time Dekorra was sending many curleaths of flour to the pioneers of northern Wisconsin.

The first store was opened by Bodee & Nelson in 1843, and T. C. Nelsen became the first postmaster. There followed an influx of settlers, mostly Scotch—the McLeods, Whitesides, Boreides, Douglasses, Gibbons and Hatters. James R. Haste, who lived to the age of 92, was a school teacher, chairman of the town board, and county treasurer.

THE earliest means of crossing the river was a pole ferry, the cost of the crossing depending upon the number of men required to operate the conveyance. Traveling on this was uncertain and as there was always a doubt as to where the craft would land. The iron ferry which followed was some improvement. Hanks, several feet in length, were welded together until they reached halfway across the stream from which spread cables bristled. The blacksmith and the ferryman, who was the price of their liberty.

SOON after the bombardment of Fort Sumter, Capt. William Ryan, who had been a British soldier, organized the Dekorra home guard. There were 100 men in the organization, 50 with uniforms and 50 without. The red flannel shirts were trimmed with black velvet and length, were welded together until they reached halfway across the stream from which spread cables bristled. The blacksmith and ferryman, who was the price of their liberty.

Occasionally the welding gave way, and then it was necessary for a scow to be anchored where the break occurred in order to make repairs. At these times the whole population was called out to assist in bringing the road to its proper station. Cattle ferries succeeded the cumbersome one of logs.

Hugh Muir, justice of the peace, held court in a log cabin. In front of a huge fireplace, Luther S. Dono, later chief justice of the state supreme court, tried his first case there. It was a jury trial and when it retired for the only time to go was the vegetable dugout cellar.

"Our pioneer parents could improvise," an early resident wrote. "They could cross rivers without bridges, they could enact laws without capitols, they could hold court without courthouses and they could execute a hold haint without a gallows. Eternal vigilance was the price of their liberty."

After the war the revival of business followed the railroads and Dekorra's population shifted away to Portage on one side and to Horicon on the other. The old lumber days on the river were gone, the post office was closed, the hill t镇ed lost its patrimony and boarded up its windows, the blacksmith shut his shop, one by one.
At left: Mrs. Allen who vividly recounts the interesting history of the village of Dekorra.

The village well, with windlass and bucket, is a mute reminder of a once thriving village which is now but a memory.

The stores closed their doors, the sawdust under the old lumber mill gathered a coat of mold, and the grist mill stilled its wheels forever.

"Neighbors moved away," Mrs. Allen says, "or were hid to rest in the grave beyond the church and only the village well, with its windlass and bucket, is left to tell the story."