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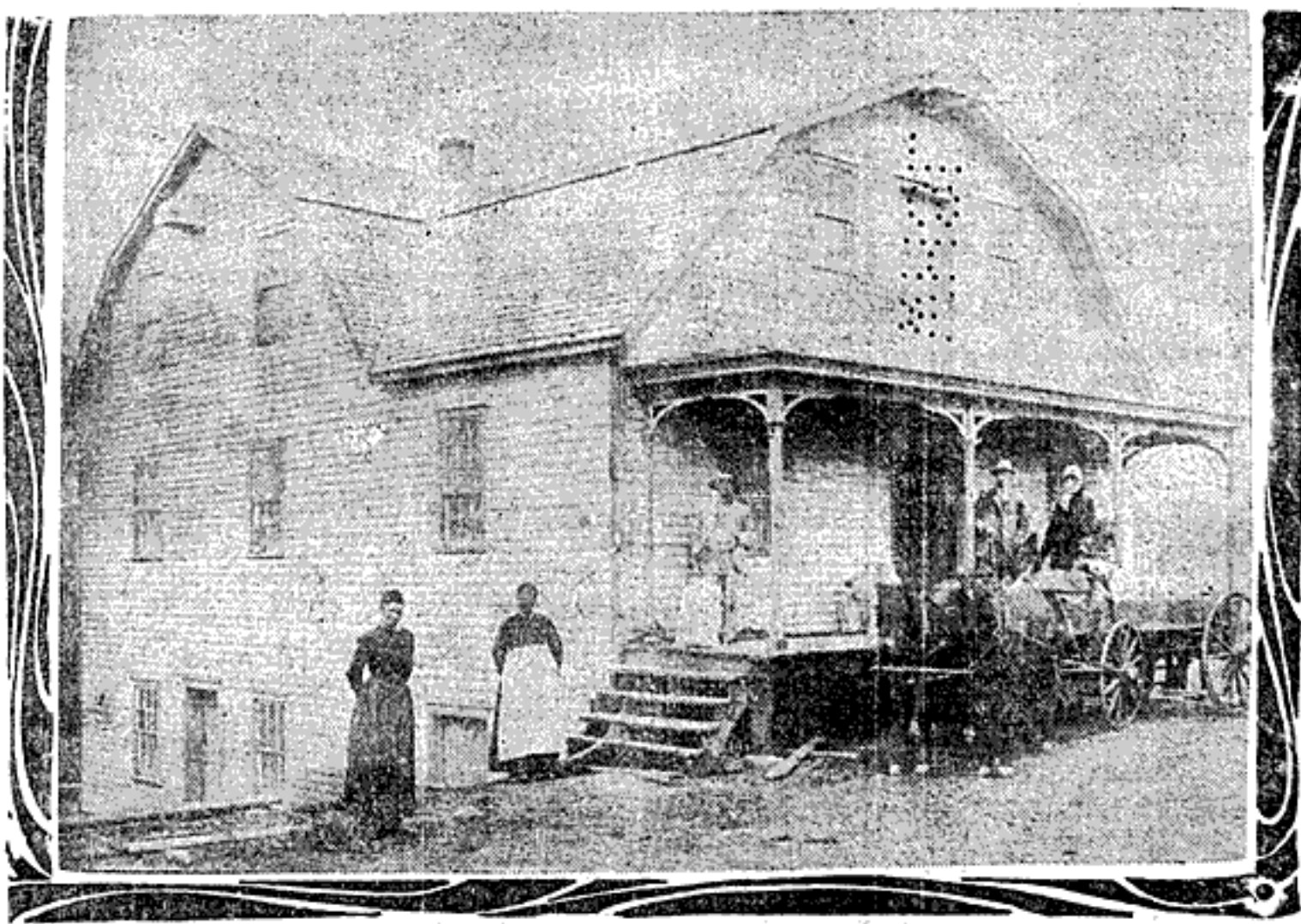
## OLD GRIST MILL AT

## DEKORRA IS REBUILT.

**P**ORTAGE, 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, Wyocena, 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.



Structure First Operated in 1843 is Incorporated in New Structure on the Same Site.

# Town Vanished With the Lumber Rafts

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

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**I**N A VINE CLAD, weather beaten cottage close to the lapping waters of the Wisconsin river, a deft rugmaker weaves memories into the colorful strands.

room considered necessary for every 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 hoarse whistled greeting on their lazy way to St. Louis.

For 70 years Mrs. Alice Allen has lived the story of the river. To the gay lass with fluttering curls the years have brought a serious peace, while the once thriving village in which she lives has become a mere dot on maps, growing smaller each year.

Sitting in her charming, old fashioned cottage, Mrs. Allen dreams of the dances in the old McEwan hotel on the hill, of thrilling rides across the river on a pole ferry and of the husband long since called home. Her eyes dim as she gazes across the meadow toward the desolated home where they began housekeeping in the long ago.

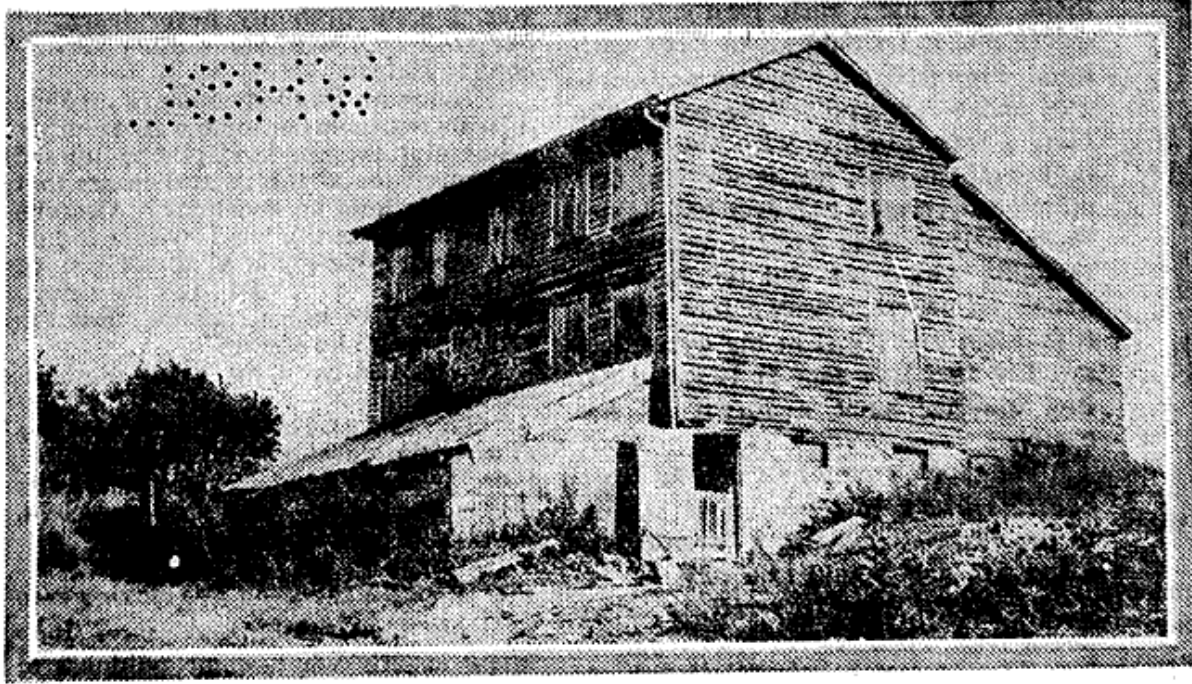
There were two taverns, to take care of the many visitors; the millwheel sang a merry song; the postoffice brought news from the outside world; there were shoe shops and general stores, blacksmith shops and the bar-

**B**ACK 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 1837 J. W. Rhodes and Thomas Nelson, in the employ of Thompson & Trimble platted a village and began the erection of a mill.

At that time there were no mills at Baraboo, 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 grout and rock seven inches thick was built. Of the early mill only a part of this storage house wall remains.

### DUPLICATE EXPOSURE



*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 1852 S. M. Carr traded his farm in Ohio for the mill without ever seeing it. After some improvements he sold it in April, 1868, to John McKenzie for \$9,000. At this time Dekorra was sending many carloads of flour to the pineries of northern Wisconsin.

The first store was opened by Rhodes & Nelson in 1843, and T. C. Nelson became the first postmaster. There followed an influx of settlers, mostly Scotch—the McDonalds, Whitelaws, Broddies, Douglasses, Gibbons and Hasties. James B. Hastie, who lived to the age of 82, was a school teacher, chairman of the town board, and county treasurer.

**T**HE 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 concern. Traveling on this was uncertain as there was always a doubt as to where the craft would land. The iron ferry which followed was some improvement. Rods, several feet in length, were welded together until they reached halfway across the stream from either bank. After the two joined lengths were ready the blacksmith poled his force to the middle of the river where the final welding was done.

Occasionally the welding gave way, 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 rod to

its proper station.

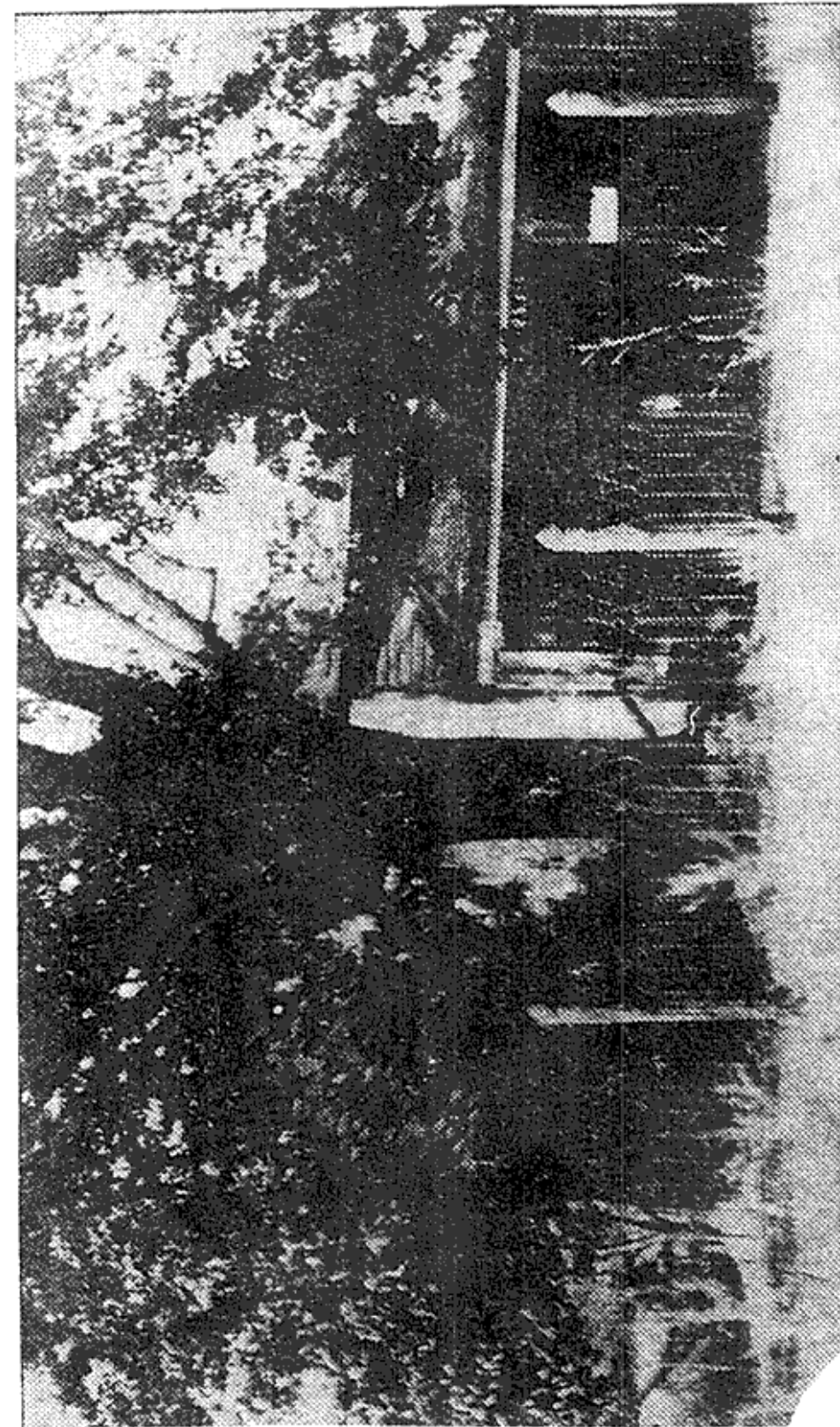
Cable ferries succeeded the cumbersome one of rods.

Hugh Muir, justice of the peace, held court in a log cabin, in front of a huge fireplace. Luther S. Dixon, later chief justice of the state supreme court, tried his first case there. It was a jury trial and when it retired the only place 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 bold bandit without a gallows. Eternal vigilance was the price of their liberty."

**S**OON 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 glistened with brass buttons upon which spread eagles bristled. The black trousers had red stripes down the sides of the legs and natty gray caps topped the outfit.

When the time came to go the guard was not taken as an organization, but Capt. Ryan with about half the organization joined the Iron brigade and the remainder went with various other outfits. The first man killed at Pittsburgh landing was one of Dekorra's home guard, George Hilman, 18th Wisconsin volunteers.

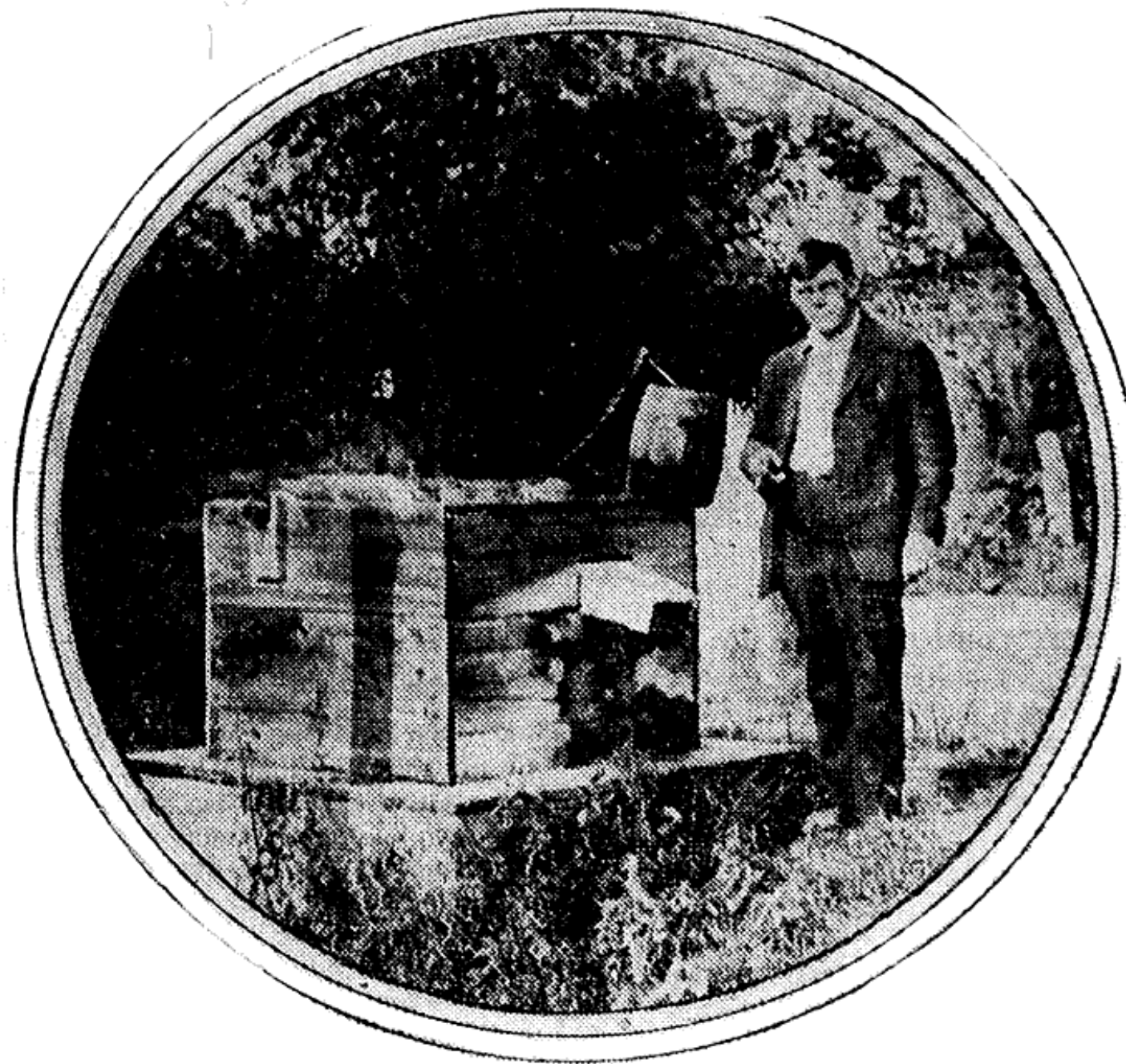


*Above; the charming, old-fashioned cottage of Mrs. Alice Allen.*

After the war the revival of business followed the railroads and Dekorra's population slipped away to Portage on one side and to Baraboo on the other. The old lumber days on the river were gone, the postoffice was closed, the hill tavern lost its patronage 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 laid to rest in the graveyard beyond the church and only the village well, with its windlass and bucket, is left to tell the story."