

# Harper's Grist Mill

SITE #010103

GC1TWWX

Written & Researched by Don Logan

## SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Ashcroft, V0K 1A0  
 Parking: N 50°44.360'  
 W 121°15.665'  
 Geocache Location: N 50°44.278'  
 W 121°15.617'  
 Accuracy: 5 meters  
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page  
 UTM: East 0622758;  
 North 5622129 10U  
 Geocache altitude: 315 m./1,035 ft.  
 Overall difficulty: 1.5  
 Terrain difficulty: 2  
*(1=easiest; 5=hardest)*  
 Date Established: c 1878  
 Ownership: Private Property  
 Access: • Public Road  
 • Year-round  
 • Vehicle accessible  
 • Caution: watch for cactus.  
 • *Detailed access information on next page.*

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:  
 Gold Country Communities Society  
 P.O. Box 933 Cache Creek, B.C. V0K 1H0  
 Tel: 1-877-453-9467  
 email: [info@exploregoldcountry.com](mailto:info@exploregoldcountry.com)

For more site pages go to:  
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Photo: Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, n° A-03486

Harper's Grist Mill c 1890

Jerome and Thaddeus, sons of Adam and Margaret Harper of Tucker County, West Virginia, arrived in British Columbia via Santa Clara County, California around 1859. Jerome began in the sawmill business in Yale and Thaddeus had entered an unsuccessful bid for construction on the new Cariboo Road.

Jerome, the elder brother, seemed to be the driving force of the Harper Empire. As early as 1862 he had property west of Kamloops known as the "Harper Ranch", a comparatively small holding. It was here that he would winter his cattle drives before the final push to the gold fields.

Land holdings and cattle were instrumental in the brothers' success and enduring reputation. Involvement in other endeavors, mining, sawmilling and grain milling also contributed, these aspects seldom recognized.

Jerome began operating a sawmill at Quesnelle Mouth, which he and partner Wright purchased in 1864, intending to add a flourmill to the operation. The flourmill never materialized and the sawmill steam equipment was sold off. Milling was again in the works for Jerome in 1868, when he entered into a partnership with Jonathon H. Scott, a landowner 4 km north of Clinton. There Jerome built his



Photo: Royal BC Museum, BC Archives, n° B-00937

Jerome Harper c 1865

first gristmill. This was to be home for Jerome until he advertised in December 1871, his intention to retire and sell his gristmill and sawmill holdings.

Jerome moved to California before concluding a sale. He died there in 1874 and the gristmill and balance of his estate passed to Thaddeus.

Two factors determined Thaddeus' decision to move the Clinton mill to the mouth of the Bonaparte River in 1878. A tollbooth existed in Clinton and all the grain from the south was subject to toll. Harper lobbied, unsuccessfully, to have the tollbooth moved north of his mill. Also, there was the promise of the Canadian Pacific Railway arrival and anticipation that the route would follow the Thompson River. Thaddeus and his partner, Benjamin Van Vaulkenburg, requested and were granted permission from the mortgage holder to move the mill.

With control of Jerome's estate, Thaddeus now proceeded to acquire the holdings that would in fact be the "Harper Legend," adding additional land in Kamloops, the Perry Ranch in Cache Creek, the Kelly Lake Ranch in Clinton and the renowned Gang Ranch. This acquisition frenzy would eventually be the downfall of Thaddeus. Harper had all his credit with one agent who eventually called his notes.

The Harper Empire was forced into bankruptcy in 1888 and was taken over by The Western Canadian Ranching Company. Although unwanted, the gristmill was included. Thaddeus had never legally purchased the land at the site of the mill, but had spent \$20,000 on the buildings and flumes. After some years of successful operation, the small mill could no longer compete with rail shipments from much larger mills in the east.



*In 1878, Harper's Flour Mill was relocated near Ashcroft, where the Bonaparte River meets the Thompson River.*

Construction of the Canadian National Railway lines obliterated the original grist mill site and changed the landscape of the area. However, you may still view the location from across the river on Evans Road or from the cache site above.

**Detailed access information:**

- From Ashcroft, follow Elm St. east beyond the end of the pavement.
- Park near the fence along the old dirt road to south east and off gravel road.
- Please yield to farm equipment.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES**

Gallagher, J. Thaddeus Harper. In *The Western Canadian Ranching Co.* Victoria City Archives.

Laing, F. W. (1942). Some Pioneers of the Cattle Industry. *B.C. Historical Quarterly*.