PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) ______031-0001_________

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

We are seeking to obtain official recognition of the mill’s historical significance to the area.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits?    Yes _____  No __x___
Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR’s easement program?   Yes _____  No __x___

1. General Property Information

Property name: ______Roberson Mill______________________

Property address: ____1367 Roberson Mill Road SE___________________

City or Town:___Floyd______

Zip code: ____24019________

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: __Floyd County______

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building __x__  Site _____  Structure _____   Object _____

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: ______+/- 3.0 acres_____________________

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban _____ Suburban _____ Town _____ Village _____ Hamlet _____ Rural__x___

Briefly describe the property’s overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The mill is located on the south side of Roberson Mill Rd SE (Rt. 714), on the inside of a 90-degree bend in the road; about one-quarter mile from Route 8. The West Fork of Dodd Creek meanders through a nearly flat, fertile meadow on the east and south sides of the mill, and before 1972 was channeled to the mill race and a wooden flume that led to the mill wheel. The flume has deteriorated, leaving only the mill wheel on the east side of the mill building. Until about 40 years ago, a spring house stood directly across the road from the mill. Parts of the earthen mill race remain intact. The county parcel ID# is 66-12.
3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): No discernable style

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here:

If the builder is known, please list here: John W. Epperly, millwright (builder)

Date of construction (can be approximate): 1880s

Narrative Description:
In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

Roberson Mill is an a frame two-story grist mill that measures about 25’ x 35’. It is estimated to have been built in the 1880’s by John W. Epperly. The mill building is structurally sound and many of the inner workings are still intact, but the building and steel water wheel are in overall poor condition.

The mill was last in operation around 1984. After the wooden sluice began to collapse in 1972, milling continued using electric power instead of water power. The last work on the building was done in the mid 1990s, when the foundation and roof were repaired. Since then it has continued to deteriorate; however, the roof remains sound and continues to protect the interior.

The book *The Water-powered Mills of Floyd County, Virginia: Illustrated Histories, 1770-2010* [Franklin F. Webb and Ricky L. Cox, 2012: 111-114] contains good descriptions and history of the Roberson Mill and notes the following as unique [or unusual] features:

- Split-level main floor, no basement. The main gearing is exposed to and accessible from the main floor.
- The millstones sit on an elevated platform [built of heavy timbers].
- Stairs in the center of the mill, rather an along a wall or in a corner.
- Minimal shafts and belting.
- John W. Epperly’s name is stamped in the forged steel arms of the millstone hoist.
- The wooden mill race (flume) was among the longest and tallest in the county.

In addition the book notes that the wooden overshot water wheel was replaced by a Fitz steel overshot wheel in 1956. There are two burr millstones and a buckwheat huller.

Besides the mill wheel, there are no other extant historic resources associated with the mill. The flume is pictured in the Webb and Cox book.
4. Property’s History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

The mill was built by John W. Epperly in the 1880s and purchased by miller Homer Roberson in 1931. Homer’s son Harry purchased the mill in 1988 and retains ownership currently. Epperly is noted as having been “one of Floyd County’s most accomplished millwrights.” Cleve Smith bought “John Epperly’s old mill” from J. W. Brammer in 1922 and sold it to John Smith in 1926. Smith sold it to Homer Roberson in 1931. His son Harry Roberson operated the mill at varying capacities until 1988.

“The mill was one of the last two commercial mills to operate under water power in the county and one of only two existing flour mills that was neither designed to incorporate a roller mill nor modified afterward to accommodate one…The Roberson mill represents, therefore, the county’s most authentic picture of flour milling as it was done in the United States through most of the 19th century. At the same time, it is the most distinctive among mills (that were still standing in 2010) in design and machine layout, and also demonstrated some of the finest craftsmanship in wood and metal components. The pride Epperly took in what he built, evidenced by the stamping of his name on the forged steel arms of the stone hoist, was well justified” [Webb and Cox, 111-114].

The pages of the Roberson Mill entry from Webb and Cox’s book are enclosed as an attachment.
5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):
   Private: ✓ Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)
name/title: Harry A. Roberson and Mary E. Roberson
organization: N/A
street & number: 13407 Roberson Mill Rd, NW
city or town: Floyd state: VA zip code: 24091
e-mail: creed@swva.net telephone: 540 320 5588

Legal Owner's Signature: __________________________ Date: 9-24-19
* Signature required for processing all applications. *

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.
   Contact person: ____________________________
   Daytime Telephone: ____________________________

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)
name/title: Karen Roberson Cox
organization: N/A
street & number: 349 Holten Valley Rd, NW
city or town: Floyd state: VA zip code: 24091
e-mail: cox@swva.net telephone: 540 320 5588

6. Notification
In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator, City Manager, and/or Town Manager
name/title: Terri Morris
locality: Cowpasture
street & number: P.O. Box 218
city or town: Floyd state: VA zip code: 24091
telephone: (540) 745 0700
Property Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property Names</th>
<th>Name Explanation</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historic</td>
<td>Cannady Mill</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historic</td>
<td>Epperly Mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic/Current</td>
<td></td>
<td>Roberson Mill</td>
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</table>

Property Addresses
- Current: Roberson Mill Road Route 714
- County/Independent City(s): Floyd (County)
- Incorporated Town(s): No Data
- Zip Code(s): 24091
- Magisterial District(s): No Data
- Tax Parcel(s): 66-11
- USGS Quad(s): WOOLWINE

Property Evaluation Status
- Not Evaluated

Additional Property Information

Architecture Setting: Rural
Acreage: No Data

Site Description:
- 1958: Located five miles southeast of Floyd, just north of Route 8 on Route 714.
- 1968: Eberle Mill is located on the north bank of southwestern tributary of Dodd Creek, on the south side of Route 714, northeast of the intersection of Routes 714 and 8.
- 2013: The Epperly/Roberson Mill is located on a grassy floodplain of the West Fork of Dodd Creek and an earthen race runs along an adjacent ridge slope covered with trees. Both the mill and the race are located beside Roberson Mill Road (Route 714). Surrounding land retains a rural quality with pastures interspersed with stands of woods. Late 19th-century through mid 20th-century farmsteads and residential houses lie adjacent to the pasture lands. Roberson Mill Road has been improved as a two lane road with an asphalt surface, and land adjacent to the road is primarily wooded.

Surveyor Assessment:
- 1958: Originally owned by John Eberle and owned at present by H.A. Roberson. Of notable value to the community.
- Dec 1971: The mill run and wheel remain. The wooden wheel was used until 1956.
- 1975: The mill is currently owned and operated by Harry Roberson. Homer Roberson, Harry's father, bought the mill in 1931 and left it to his five children.
- Aug. 2012: Though decrepit, the mill is still stands in largely unaltered condition, which makes it a rare survival. For the time being, it is likely eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C in the areas of Industry/Processing/Extraction and Architecture/Engineering, respectively.
- 2013: The Epperly/Roberson Mill represents a once common economic and social center that was an integral component of a self-sustaining local economy. Perhaps due to a number of reasons, the mill stayed in steady operation for over 100 years and continued to contribute to a local economy undergoing marked change. Deed Book research and Roberson family history provided Webb and Cox (2012:111-114) with the grist necessary to formulate a history of the Epperly/Roberson Mill and a discussion of its significance in the context of 20th-century mill technological changes and economic trends. These changes and trends contributed to the dissolution of a local, sustainable economy, fostered a reliance on developing national market systems, and ushered in a social transformation at the local level.
- John W. Epperly, an accomplished millwright, purchased land in 1880 and subsequently built the mill. The initial deed also mentioned an existing mill race, so Epperly or another person probably started to develop the system of water power prior to 1880. Nine years after Epperly established his milling business, he finally secured water rights and title to parcels adjacent to the mill which held other parts of the race. Epperly sold the mill in 1903 and for the next 28 years the mill operated under a series of owners. The mill has remained in the Roberson family since Homer Roberson purchased it in 1931. Homer Roberson operated the mill until his 1966 accidental death in the mill. His son Harry continued operation of the mill with water power until the wooden race fell into disrepair in 1970. Harry Roberson wired the mill and electricity was used to power the buhr stones and a new hammermill. He continued milling until 1984. At the age of 82, Harry Roberson still has a herd of cattle on adjoining land, makes some repairs to the mill and race, and he carries the technological and social history of the mill.
The Epperly/Roberson Mill “was one of the last two commercial mills to operate under water power in Floyd County and one of only two existing Floyd County flour mills that was neither designed to incorporate a roller mill nor modified afterward to accommodate one” (Webb and Cox 2012: 111). Of the late 19th-century through early 20th-century technologic changes in the milling industry, the hallmark change involved a shift from the Oliver Evans system of flour milling to the roller mill system. By the time Homer Roberson bought the mill, grain milling continued to linger as a main component of a sustainable local economy. However, the people of Floyd County, like people in all of rural America, were increasingly dependent upon a national market system in which production and processing took place in other parts of the country and products were shipped into all rural and non-rural areas. Why Epperly and subsequent owners of the mill did not convert to roller millers remains uncertain. Homer and Harry Roberson opted to continue use of the Evans system of milling which was in place at the mill and operating smoothly. They filled whatever traditional orders the local market requested, and also specialized in the autumnal, niche markets of grinding buckwheat and rye, two types of grains not adequately processed by roller mills. The only major changes in the mill’s final 53 years of operation include the 1956 replacement of a 16-foot wooden wheel with an Fitz 18-foot steel wheel previously installed at the Hosea Wimmer mill (see DHR #031-5069), and the circa 1970 installation of electricity that powered the buhr stone and a new hammermill.

Surveyor Recommendation: Legacy
Ownership
- Ownership Category: Private
- Ownership Entity: No Data

Primary Resource Information

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<tr>
<th>Resource Category:</th>
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<td>Date Source:</td>
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<td>Threats to Resource:</td>
<td>Deterioration, Neglect, Vacant</td>
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Architectural Description:

1958: Two and a half story frame mill, built circa 1870 in the Early Republic style.

1968: Frame with clapboarding, 2 stories, gable roof, elevated race, exterior mill wheel. Late 19th century.

1971: Overshot wheel; flume still stands and is in use.

August 2012: The mill is no longer in use and receives no maintanence. Some windows are missing, as well as many weatherboards, leaving the interior open to the weather; although the V-crimp sheet-metal roof appears to be doing its job. The rusty 20-foot steel water wheel remains in place.

2013: The neglected grist and saw mill building measures 30 by 40 feet is in a state of disrepair and is actively deteriorating. Because the mill has an absentee landowner, the interior is no longer accessible; however, Webb and Cox (2012: 112) provide a short description of the interior and note its unusual features. Undoubtedly of frame construction buttressed by heavy timbers, the mill extends 2.5 stories in height and is protected by a gabled roof covered with standing seam metal. Historic photographs also depict a shed roof covered with wood shingles that was applied to the first story exterior on the east side of the building. The roof sheltered the main drive shaft and gears located outside the building. The building initially rested on a continuous foundation of dry-laid coursed stone (local “mountain rock” – amphibolite gneiss, metabasalt, metagabbro – and soapstone. Most of the soapstone slabs exhibit adze marks). Much of the foundation continues to exist, but some sections have fallen and some sections were replaced with poured cement. The exterior covering is oak and poplar weatherboard applied with modern wire nails. However, some reused machine cut nails are present. Some of the weatherboards are no longer present. Vertical plank doors on the west and north sides were constructed with machine cut nails. Most of the windows are 6-over-6 double sash, but a few are fixed. Most of the windows lacks glass panes. On the west side, the first floor features a Dutch door and a vertical plank door, and the second floor features two windows. The north side has a Dutch door and a window on the first floor, two windows on the second floor and one window on the upper floor, or garret. The first floor of the east side features two windows – one horizontal and one vertical – and two vertical plank doors on the second floor that provided access to the elevated wooden race and the gate. The south side features two windows on both the first and second floors, and one window on the upper floor. A Fitz 18-foot overshot wheel is located on the east side along with a smaller wooden wheel and the main drive components. The main drive shaft extends into the building through a circular hole in the wall.
Windows: Sash, Double-Hung  
Roof: Gable  
Foundation: Other  
Structural System and Exterior Treatment: Frame

<table>
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<th>Windows</th>
<th>Sash, Double-Hung</th>
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<tr>
<td>Roof</td>
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<td>Structural System and Exterior Treatment</td>
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Secondary Resource Information

Secondary Resource #1

- Resource Category: Industry/Processing/Extraction
- Resource Type: Mill Race
- Date of Construction: 1880Ca
- Date Source: Local Records
- Historic Time Period: Reconstruction and Growth (1866 - 1916)
- Historic Context(s): Industry/Processing/Extraction
- Architectural Style: No discernible style
- Form: No Data
- Condition: Good
- Threats to Resource: Erosion

Architectural Description:

2013: The mill race is readily apparent on a northeast to southwest trending ridge slope that parallels a section of Roberson Mill Road. The race runs from Tuggles Gap Road (Route 8) for a distance of about 1,115 feet to the northeast where it ends at the edge of the ridge overlooking the southwest bank of the West Fork of Dodd’s Creek, just southwest of the mill. Support posts and other remains of the once standing elevated wooden race are present on the ridge slope and on the floodplain adjacent to the mill. Various editions of the Floyd Quadrangle incorrectly map the race as flowing water that is part of the West Fork of Dodd Creek. Most of the race is between 3-5 feet deep with a U- to V-shaped cross section. Harry Roberson indicated the race ran under Route 8 where a wooden bridge permitted vehicular traffic over the race. When the road was paved, the Department of Transportation installed a culvert in the race, but its small diameter will not permit the race to function properly. The race continues on the other side of Route 8, but its length remains undetermined because property access was not available at the time of survey. Harry Roberson said his father completed periodic maintenance of the race with a team of horses pulling a plow and scraper. Harry Roberson switched to a tractor and this probably accounts for the more V-shaped cross section of the race. He continues to hold an easement for the entire earthen race, and he proudly maintains the race although water power to the mill ended around 1970. He stills removed leaves, repairs it when necessary and checks the race after heavy rains to make sure it holds water properly.

Apparently, the replacement of the original 16-foot wood wheel with the 18-foot steel wheel caused interference with the tail water and prompted modification of the wheel pit and tail race. The remains of the wheel pit now form a roughly triangular depression about 1.5 feet deep that narrows into a tail race that extends eastward for about 40 feet before it intersects with the West Fork of Dodd Creek.

Historic District Information

- Historic District Name: No Data
- Local Historic District Name: No Data
- Historic District Significance: No Data

CRM Events

Event Type: Survey:Phase I/Reconnaissance

- Project Review File Number: No Data
- Investigator: Thomas Klatka
- Organization/Company: DHR
- Photographic Media: Digital
- Survey Date: 4/26/2013
- Dhr Library Report Number: No Data
- Project Staff/Notes: DHR regional archaeologist completed a condition assessment, collected additional field documentation, compiled historic information and interviewed former miller Harry Roberson.
### Surveyor's NR Criteria

**Recommendations:**

A - Associated with Broad Patterns of History, C - Distinctive Characteristics of Architecture/Construction

### Event Type: Survey:Phase I/Reconnaissance

| Project Review File Number: | No Data |
| Investigator:              | Michael J. Pulice |
| Organization/Company:      | DHR |
| Photographic Media:        | Digital |
| Survey Date:               | 8/29/2012 |
| Dhr Library Report Number: | No Data |
| Project Staff/Notes:       | DHR Western Region architectural historian Mike Pulice |

### Event Type: DHR Staff Site Visit

| Project Review File Number: | No Data |
| Investigator:               | Anne Carter Lee |
| Organization/Company:       | VA Dept. of Historic Resources |
| Photographic Media:         | Film |
| Survey Date:                | 12/1/1971 |
| Dhr Library Report Number:  | No Data |
| Project Staff/Notes:        | No Data |

### Event Type: Survey:Windshield

| Project Review File Number: | No Data |
| Investigator:               | Norm Thompson |
| Organization/Company:       | Independent Research |
| Photographic Media:         | Film |
| Survey Date:                | 1/1/1970 |
| Dhr Library Report Number:  | No Data |
| Project Staff/Notes:        | Mill survey |

### Event Type: Survey:Phase I/Reconnaissance

| Project Review File Number: | No Data |
| Investigator:               | Tucker H. Hill |
| Organization/Company:       | VA Dept. of Historic Resources |
| Photographic Media:         | Film |
| Survey Date:                | 11/28/1968 |
| Dhr Library Report Number:  | No Data |
| Project Staff/Notes:        | Update of HABSI survey by Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission architectural historian T.H. Hill. |

### Event Type: Survey:HABS Inventory

| Project Review File Number: | No Data |
| Investigator:               | Edward K. Williams |
| Organization/Company:       | UVA |
**Photographic Media:** Film  
**Survey Date:** 8/8/1958  
**DHR Library Report Number:** No Data  
**Project Staff/Notes:** HABS survey  
**Surveyor’s NR Criteria Recommendations:** A - Associated with Broad Patterns of History, C - Distinctive Characteristics of Architecture/Construction

### Bibliographic Information

**Bibliography:**
Name: Webb, Franklin  
Record Type: Book  
Bibliographic Notes: Webb, Franklin F. and Ricky L. Cox  

Name: Kennedy, Joe; The Roanoke Times  
Record Type: Article  
Bibliographic Notes: "Buckwheat Flour Time in Floyd County: The Belts and Wheels of the Old Mill Clatter into Action"  
November 1975

### Property Notes:
Name: Harry Roberson  
Address 1: 1367 Roberson Mill Rd SE  
City: Floyd  
State: Virginia  
Phone 1: 540-745-3301

Surveyor Notes: The midsection of race to its end at Rt.8 is on parcel 66-11. Harry Roberson is also the former owner of the mill building. 
Owner Relationship: Owner of property

Name: Broderick Living Trust  
Address 1: 440 Dehaven Rd  
City: Penndall  
State: Pennsylvania

Surveyor Notes: The mill building and the north part of race are on parcel 66-72 which consists of 49.55 acres. 
Owner Relationship: Owner of property
27. Old J. W. Epperly Mill/Homer Roberson Mill

**Dodd Creek**

**LOCATION:** South side of Route 714 (Roberson Mill Road SE) about .25 mile east of Route 8 (Parkway Lane S); **POWER:** Wooden overshot wheel, replaced by Fitz steel overshot wheel in 1956; **STONES:** Two sets and buckwheat huller, sawmill; **VISIBLE REMAINS:** Mill still standing with overshot wheel in place, both in poor condition. Dug race and remnants of the long (½ mile) wooden race

**History.** John W. Epperly, one of Floyd County's most accomplished millwrights, built what is now known as the Roberson mill in the 1880s on land that may already have been developed as a water power site. Epperly was also a skilled blacksmith and gunsmith, and according to his great-grandson Jim Altizer, had a blacksmith shop across the road from the mill.27 Stuart Cannaday is said to have worked as a miller for Epperly and for the mill’s third owner, Rufus Abraham “Abe” DeHart, who bought the mill from Harrison Scott in 1910. DeHart ran the store while Cannaday looked after the mill, but was himself a miller, having learned the trade from his father, Stephen DeHart, on Rock Castle Creek in nearby Patrick County, Virginia. Abe DeHart later owned the second John W. Epperly Mill (IV, 126) and, at some point, McDonald’s Mill on the North Fork of the Roanoke River in Montgomery County, Virginia.

Cleve Smith bought what was by then known as John Epperly’s Old Mill from J. W. Brammer in 1922 and stayed on as miller after selling the property to John Smith in 1926. The mill has been in the Roberson family since John Smith sold it to Homer Roberson in 1931. Current owner, Harry Roberson operated the mill under water power until the wooden race or flume collapsed about 1970. Electric power was used to grind buckwheat flour on a part-time basis until 1984. Phillip Gettel noted in a 1985 survey of Floyd area mills that a single poplar tree provided the weatherboard siding for one side and both ends of the 2½-story Roberson mill.28

The Roberson Mill was one of the last two commercial mills to operate under water power in Floyd County and one of only two existing Floyd County flour mills that was neither designed to incorporate a roller mill nor modified afterward to accommodate one. The other is the William Allen Simpson Mill (II, 113) which is older but far less complete, having been used on headwaters of Dodd Creek. Dam not to be high enough to cover spring.

D. B. 43, page 20, 12 May 1917. James Wesley Ferguson to Ira M. Compton, mill property and all water rights. Not to build dam so high as to interfere with spring.

The Fitz steel wheel was installed in 1956, replacing the last wooden water wheel in use at a commercial mill in Floyd County. The race collapsed soon after this picture was taken in 1972 but the mill ran until around 1984, grinding buckwheat part-time using electric power. (Courtesy Floyd County Historical Society)

for other purposes since closing its doors around 1941. The Roberson mill represents, therefore, the county’s most authentic picture of flour milling as it was done in the United States through most of the 19th century. At the same time, it is the most distinctive among mills (that were still standing in 2010) in design and machine layout, and also demonstrated some of the finest craftsmanship in wood and metal components. The pride Epperly took in what he built, evidenced by the stamping of his name on the forged steel arms of the stone hoist, was well justified.

Unusual features include a split-level main floor; no basement; main gearing exposed to and accessible from the main floor; elevated stone platform; elevators with individual drive shafts, oriented at right angles to the peak of the roof; fully floored third level; stairs placed in the center of the mill (most are along a wall or in a corner); and minimal shafts and belting. Power is carried to upper floors by a vertical shaft extending upward from the main drive gear. This last may be characteristic of mills that pre-dated the arrival of roller mills and their attendant line shafts, drive belts, and pulleys; a similar system was used in the William Allen Simpson Mill, the only other remaining flour mill that was never converted to the roller system.

Why a mill whose owners resisted a powerful trend toward modernization outlasted many newer mills both as a structure and a business may have as much to do with personalities as it does technology, but nonetheless invites speculation about the impact of two interesting circumstances on the history of this and other Floyd County mills.

The first of these circumstances is that the mill was built in the 1880s, during which decade the flour milling industry in the United States was undergoing the most significant technological change in its entire history—the transition from the time honored method of crushing and cutting grain between two millstones, one revolving and the other stationary, to the roller mill process, which abrades grain between as many as eight separate pairs of corrugated steel rollers rotating in the same direction, like the rollers in a clothes wringer, but at much higher and slightly different speeds. Had John Epperly built a roller mill on this site in the 1880s, it would have been the very first in the county. As it turned out, his was among the very last Floyd County flour mills* to incorporate the old Oliver

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*The Irvin Huff Mill (I, 2) and the William Jackson Stanley Mill (I, 54) were built after 1900 to make flour using the Evans system, and both were on streams so small that a roller mill system may have been unworkable. The Irvin Huff Mill was, like Roberson’s, known for its excellent buckwheat flour.
Evans system of flour milling, the chief components of which (in Floyd County flour mills) are one set of conventional millstones specially dressed for grinding wheat and a simple reel-type sifter. Additional needs include shafting with pulleys and belts or gears to transmit power, elevators and spouts for moving wheat and flour between levels, and one or more machines for removing foreign matter from the wheat before it is ground. But even in its most complex form, the Evans system is simpler and less expensive than the roller mill system that replaced it. It is also slower and less efficient at producing the highest return per bushel of the ultra-white, ultra-fine flour Americans had been persuaded to prefer over the slightly coarser, slightly darker flour produced by buhr-stone flour mills. Had he waited even ten years, John Epperly probably would have planned from the outset to install a roller mill system, and having made that choice, may not have built a mill here at all since the relatively low volume of water probably couldn't have reliably generated enough power to run a high speed roller mill. He was, in effect, correcting both shortcomings—an obsolete flour milling system and an inadequate source of power—when he built a large, modern roller mill (IV, 126) several miles downstream, and below the confluence of Dodd Creek’s two main branches, fifteen years later.

The second circumstance that helps explain why the Roberson mill better represents 19th century flour milling than 20th is the fact that the men who owned it between 1900 and 1930 chose not to refit the interior and modify the water power to accommodate a roller mill system, although they no doubt knew this was happening at other older flour mills, like the Spangler Mill on Pine Creek and the Harman Mill on West Fork Creek. The owners of still other flour mills decided it was impractical to rework an existing mill and water power, and chose instead to tear down an obsolete building and build a new one. While they were at it, several replaced (with a turbine or a factory made steel water wheel) or upgraded (with a new or raised dam) the power system. This was the case with the flour mills then or later known as Greasy Creek, Vaughn’s, Ed Strong, and Thompson-Akers, among others. Only about thirty years old at the 1915 peak of the roller mill mania, the “J. W. Epperly Old Mill” may have seemed too new for its owners to consider razing and replacing it, considering, especially, how well constructed it has in the meantime proven itself to be. When it came to refitting the mill for a roller system, they may have perceived, as some of their counterparts on the headwaters of other streams did not, that there simply wasn’t enough power to be had from the available water.

Whether the men who owned the mill during these decades consciously chose not to remodel or rebuild for practical (lack of water), personal (lack of energy), or financial (lack of money) reasons, by the time Homer Roberson bought the mill in 1931, the opportunity had passed, along with the thirty-five-year flurry of mill building and refitting that would be the high-water mark of Floyd County grain milling. By the late 1920s, forward-looking Floyd County investors may have been deterred from putting money into a small-scale, agriculture-based business by the economic trends of the teens and twenties, which predicted an economic future more and more dependent on a centralized, industrialized national economy. They would certainly have been demoralized by the cash-poor reality of the 1930s. As a result of either or both circumstances, no new roller mills were built, and no old mills refitted to accept the roller system after 1930 in Floyd County. Roberson either decided, or was left with no choice, to specialize in the grinding of buckwheat, a process that was either too difficult to adapt to the roller process, or that was thought too exotic to be worth the trouble. Roberson also occasionally ground rye flour for customers who had acquired a taste for rye biscuits, which Harry Roberson described as the color of brown sugar and good right out of the oven, but not so good after they got cold.

According to Harry Roberson, Homer Roberson’s son, the only major change made by Roberson was the replacement of the 16-foot wooden wheel with Fitz steel overshot wheel. The salvaged 18-foot wheel was bought for $90 from P.L. Shelor, Jr., about 1948 and came from the Huffville Roller Miller/Ezra Wimmer Mill on Brush Creek (II, 119). It was not installed until 1956 by which time the ½ mile long wooden race or flume was also in need of repair. The steel wheel was an improvement but the extra two feet of diameter sometimes interfered with the tailwater, thereby wasting some of the wheel’s power.

Considering the number and variety of exposed gears, shafts, pulleys, and belts in a water-powered mill—or any pre-OSHA industrial plant in which every machine and mecha-
nism was driven by a single power source—accidents were inevitable. In the last fatal accident at a Floyd County mill, Homer Roberson was caught and dragged beneath the wheel on October 30, 1966, while removing a prop from the water wheel which had partially filled due to a leaking flume. Roberson was able to pull himself out of the water but died before he could be gotten to a hospital. During the 1940s Roberson's mill had been the scene of a funeral after a procession of mourners passing by the mill on its way to the cemetery was caught in a downpour. The funeral was conducted inside the mill and the casket kept there until it could be hauled over the muddy roads and to the cemetery on the back of a flatbed truck.\(^2\)

The setting, longevity, and rustic appearance of the Homer Roberson mill, combined with its nearness to a major county highway (Route 8) and to the Blue Ridge Parkway, place it among the county's most frequently photographed mills. A series of photographs taken by Roanoke Photographer W. H. Bratton around 1945 is but one proof of its appeal.

**29. Floyd Milling Company/Peter Dickerson Mill**

**LOCATION:** East side of Route 8 (S Locust Street/Parkway Lane S), Town of Floyd, across from former Skyline Sportswear Building, currently (2010) Winter Sun/Sun Music Hall; **POWER:** Gas or diesel engine, then electric motors; **STONES:** Midget Marvel flour mill; **VISIBLE REMAINS:** None

**History.** Numerous small mills were built in Floyd County after 1920 to produce cornmeal and cattle feed using gasoline or electric power, but by the time these alternatives to water power were widely available and perceived to be reliable, flour milling was in decline. The Peter Dickerson Mill was one of only three Floyd County mills built expressly to make flour using a source of power other than falling water.*

Millwright Joe Terry helped Peter Dickerson build this mill and may have worked there as well. Dickerson's choice of the Midget Marvel Mill, a self-contained unit that combined cleaning, grinding, and sifting functions in a single machine, allowed for the use of a building not radically different from other industrial or commercial structures. As a result, the building was more easily converted to retail space after the mill closed than would have been the case with a traditional multi-story flour mill with all the attendant spouts, elevators, and shafting.

A restaurant is supposed to have operated in an attached building while the Dickerson mill was running. Posey Dickerson was living in the mill when it was sold to Albert P. Smith and Fred Sweeney in 1940. Afterwards, Fred Sweeney ran a furniture store in the mill building for several years.

The two-story wood-frame building was covered with squares of patterned tin made to look like blocks of hewn stone. It stood very near to the street on the left as one drives south on Route 8/Locust Street, across from the brick

*The Burdine Reed flour mill (III, 80) used a gasoline engine. Peter Hatcher intended to make flour at his steam-powered mill (I, 21) but the flour mill was never installed.