

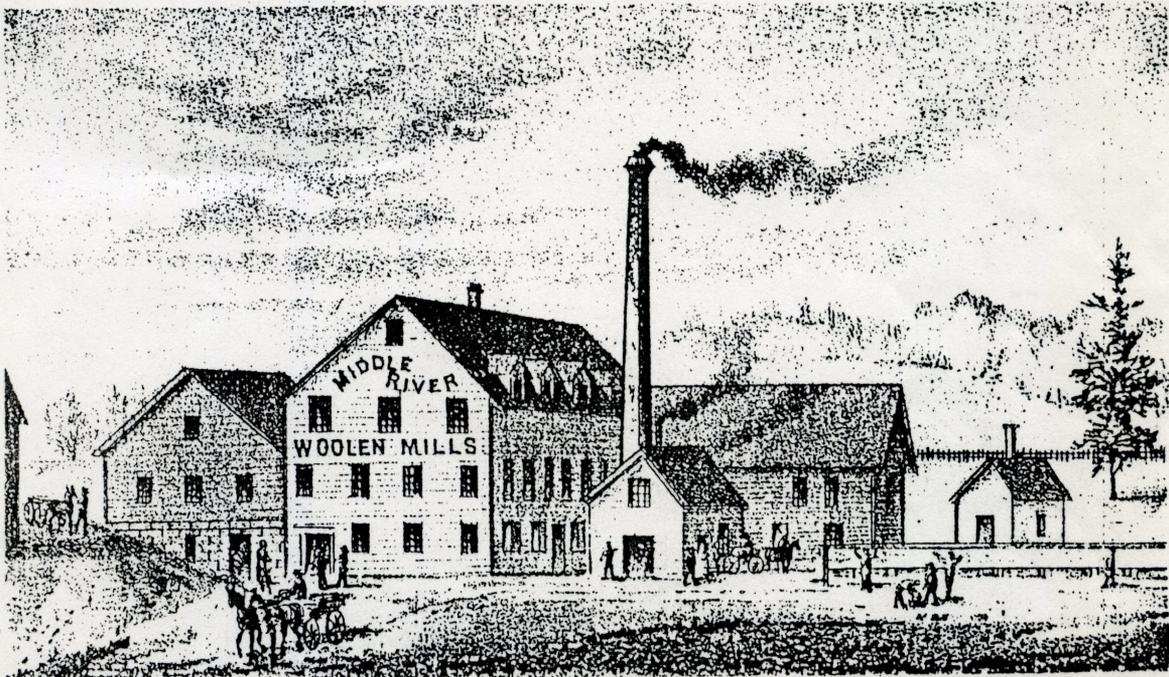
THE KERR MILLS

THOMAS KERR, founder of this family in Pictou County, had been a millwright by trade in Scotland. After settling on the east side of the Middle River, at Burnside, he built a combination saw and grist mill to service the farm community in the surrounding district. A water wheel provided the necessary power. The exact date of construction is not known, but it was likely in the 1820's. When Thomas's sons, Francis and George, were old enough, they joined their father in business, and it is said that it was they who persuaded Thomas to add a cloth mill to his other undertakings. The sons erected a building, installed the required machinery, and opened Kerr's Woollen Mill.

In the beginning, farmers brought wool to the mill to have it carded into rolls. The rolls were taken home to be spun and woven, then were returned to the mill to be dyed and finished. Spinning machinery, and later, weaving machinery, were eventually added to round out the Kerr establishment. Products included blankets, homespuns, tweeds, flannels, and stocking yarns.

The milling operations made Thomas a prosperous man among his contemporaries. His younger son, GEORGE KERR, eventually assumed sole management of the mills, and he was joined in time by three of his sons, Thomas, Robert and James. The firm became known as George Kerr & Sons.

Fire destroyed the mills in 1869, but the Kerrs rebuilt. The new facility was an improved and enlarged one, with George Kerr as the senior partner. An illustration of the second establishment appeared in the Pictou County Atlas, 1878.



GEO. KERR & SON, WOOLEN MILL, MIDDLE RIVER, PICTOU CO. N.S.

Misfortune struck the Kerr mills again about 1880 when fire ravaged the business a second time. It dealt a severe financial blow to family finances, but the 'Kerr Brothers' raised yet another enlarged mill from the ashes of the old. It was situated near the site of the old pumping station for the town of Westville, and consisted of a 3-storey woollen mill, a warehouse, a sawmill and a non-operating grist mill. Other features included a steam engine, steam heat, a water wheel, and an overhead belt and pulley system. Thirty employees could process 6,000 pounds of wool monthly into 200 yards of cloth daily. Clients came from all over Nova Scotia and as far away as New Brunswick.

Unhappily, fire struck again. On a summery July morning in 1882, the entire operation, as well as adjoining lumber and log stockpiles and 40 acres of timber, were completely destroyed. Researchers have since assumed that, this time, the Kerrs were totally ruined financially, and that the third-generation partnership of Thomas, Robert and James was dissolved; but, not so. In May, 1891, advertisements appeared in the Eastern Chronicle, New Glasgow, announcing that, like the mythological phoenix, the Kerr brothers had risen yet again from the ashes of disaster. They had assumed operation of the Rocklin Woollen Mills. On 9 July of that year, the newspaper reported in its community news that business was flourishing.

**ROCKLIN
WOOLLEN MILLS,**
NOW READY FOR THE SEASON'S
WORK IN
ROLL CARDING AND SPINNING

A limited quantity of cloth will be kept for this season.
Customers can depend on obtaining satisfaction from us and in days gone by.
Agents at New Glasgow: — JOHN R. SMITH & Co.
KERR BROS.
Rocklin, May 14, 1891.—4w pd

ROCKLIN.

Mr. James Kerr, who recently purchased the Rocklin Woollen Mills, is doing a most excellent business. His workmanship in roll carding and spinning is pronounced superior. The Messrs. Kerr have experienced many adverses, their establishments having been three times destroyed by fire, yet with characteristic pluck and enterprise they have again invested their capital in a business which we hope will profitable to themselves and which largely aid in building up our country as well.

The Rev. Mr. Scott, of New Glasgow, will deliver a lecture in the church here
Thursday evening the 14th inst. at 7 o'clock.

JAMES KERR, named in The Eastern Chronicle article, above, and mentioned beforehand as the third brother in the partnership, spent his life in the milling trade. He worked in carding mills at several Pictou County sites, as well as at Antigonish, Yarmouth, Stanfield's in Truro, and Humphrey's in Moncton. In 1902, he settled at Eureka, Pictou County, where he was involved with reorganizing the Eureka Woollen Mills into the Nova Scotia Underwear Company. Kerr assumed the management of the Newfoundland Knitting Mills in St. John's in 1913, but he returned to Eureka in 1919 to enter into partnership with his son-in-law, Andrew Lynch, to establish Kerr & Lynch, manufacturers of stocking-netting and woollen goods. He died in 1929, in his 74th year, being the last in the direct line of the Kerr millwright 'dynasty.'