

# County CONNECTION

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## The secret in Stewarts Creek

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ARARAT — History can be found in creek beds and old fields and it's important that we find it and preserve it. At least that's how Ararat native, John Edwards feels.

And find history he does.

Edwards isn't a historian. He doesn't have his master's degree in American history, genealogy or anthropology. But he does possess the curiosity and the need to know more about Surry County and the ability to go out and find it. He also wants to make sure that the county's history of Surry for future generations.

Edwards' most recent discovery was near Stewarts Creek.

"I don't really want to tell anyone where it is. I'd hate for someone to get out here and mess it up or something," he said Monday.

What he found was a millstone and the remnants of what he believes were the beginnings of a mill or what was left of a mill after a flood.

The granite stone was chiseled by hand and is approximately four feet in diameter and a foot thick. The hole in the center is nine inches across. Edwards estimated that the stone was cut at least a hundred years ago and weighs over one ton.

The stone would have been used in a mill to grind grains like wheat or corn into flour and meal. Millstones typically came in pairs. The base was called the bedstone and was stationary while the runner stone, or the one on top, would spin and would grind the grain down. The mills could be set

up along waterways and use the power of flowing water to move the stones.

"They had to have so much flow, so much gravity," Edwards said. But using dams and natural flows of water, a mill could be built.

When Edwards finds something interesting or that he feels is historic, he does research to find out everything he can about it. He goes to the courthouse to look up titles and deeds. Once he discovers who owns land, he finds people to contact with his questions and looks up old newspaper stories.

Currently, he's still in the process of learning everything he can about this possible mill site.

"I'm convinced there was a mill here. Or there was going to be a mill here," he said Monday.

While Edwards wasn't the first person to stumble upon the rock, he has taken it upon himself to discover everything he can about the area it has been found in.

In addition to the well-formed millstone, there is at least one more that was abandoned before it was completed.

Edwards showed the spot where a chunk had been broken off when the workers were attempting to chisel the huge rock into a circle.

Another sign that convinces him that there had been a mill there is the large number of cut rocks.



Geni Dowd/The Messenger

John Edwards demonstrates how big the old millstone is by spanning his hand over the center hole.

All along the creek beds there are dozens of chiseled rocks, not smooth from the wear of the water, but with harsh corners, and many even have drill holes. Even the creek bed in many places has been cut, carved, blasted and changed to create wider and deeper areas.

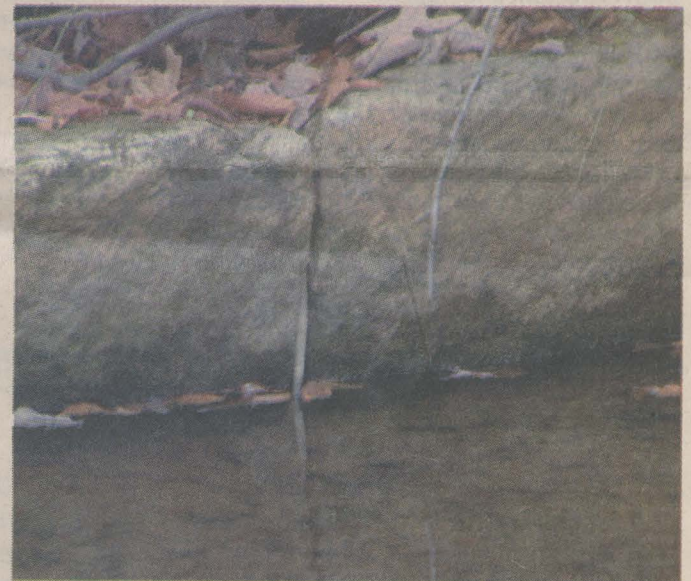
Before there was machinery to cut stone, hand tools were used. Chisels, hammers and a two-man drill would have been used to cut and shape rocks. Dynamite would have been used to blast out larger areas as well.

A large hill near the millstone is granite under about a foot of top soil. The granite would have been profitable to have quarried out. It was also ideal for making millstones.

To Edwards, learning and preserv-

ing local history is critical.

"It's going to be lost," he said. "The people who did all of this are dead. The people that still know all of this are in their 80s. Soon, there won't be many around who know it."



Evidence of a drill hole (right) leads John Edwards to believe there may once have been a mill set up on this creek.



The rock surrounding the creek bed has been blasted away and there are even drill marks along the banks. These are signs that there may have been a mill located here along Stewarts Creek.