Clinton man keeps grist mill going

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CLINTON — When he was a young man, W.W. Warm's job was to keep the grist mill going on Saturday. That was the day when farmers came from all over the area — on horseback or by mule — to have their corn ground into fine meal or ground more coarsely into grits.

With some help, he'd crank up the old 10-horsepower gasoline engine, and the grinding stone was turned with the help of a belt 8 inches wide and 20 to 30 feet long.

Back in those days, business was brisk, and home-ground meal was in demand.

At 70, Warm has seen changes take place in the demand for his grist mill. Now corn meal complete with baking power in ready-to-mix packages and instant grits have all but outdated home-ground meal.

But there are a few die-hards who still prefer stone-ground to pre-packaged, and they're the people Warm is around for, his grist mill ready and waiting.

"Once you get used to eating home-ground meal — stone-ground — you can't hardly eat store-bought meal," Warm said. "Used to be I'd be busy from early morning to late in the day grinding corn for people. Years ago just about everybody grew corn, but now you don't see much of it — just a few people here and there or farmers who grow it for cattle feed.

"But I still get people from all over, and they come to have corn ground up. But there's very few mills left in this country, and I just know of a coupla others myself."

Warm's grist mill is in a small, white, cinder-block building and has been in the Warm family for three generations. His father, August Paul Warm, taught him the workings of the mill "when I was 8, maybe 10 years old. I remember climbing on top of the hopper to see into it."

"It's quite old, but it still does the job," Warm said, referring to the grist mill. "It kind of fell in my lap, and I just keep it going, but after I'm gone I don't know what'll happen. I hope somebody keeps it going."

W.W. Warm pours yellow corn kernels into the hopper for grinding into meal

In 1961, Warm opted to slightly modernize the grist mill and replaced the gasoline engine with a small electric motor. The entire grinding process now is (See MILL, 5C)
keeps it going.

The grains of corn first must be dried.