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Gresham's Mills Becomes Bay Springs

Visitors to Bay Springs can readily understand why early settlers took a liking to this scenic area with its development potential. Dr. William Clifford Morse, State Geologist in 1935, described Bay Springs on Mackey's Creek in the following way: "Perhaps no small area in the state is so picturesquely beautiful as this Bay Springs region." The Highland Church sandstone outcrops form cliffs and gorges through which Mackey's Creek meanders. The most famous cliff is Lover's Leap, which is steeped in Chickasaw legend.

About 1838, George Gresham and his family moved from the Mars Hill area near Florence, Alabama, and settled on Mackey's Creek. He quickly saw that the high sandstone cliffs made this spot an ideal location for a dam to furnish water power. At first, George Gresham probably operated a watermill on Gin Branch which drains into Mackey's Creek. Being a well-respected man, he was appointed in 1840 to be overseer of the road from Gresham's Mill to the County line.

In the early 1840s, George Gresham and his son, James Files Gresham, erected a sawmill and grist mill on Mackey's Creek. This was to help not only the Gresham family but also the area settlers. Since this mill was the only one in that part of the County equipped for the manufacture of flour, the pioneers brought their wheat for quite a distance to have it made into flour. The Gresham's water-powered sawmill supplied the neighborhood with lumber for the construction of new frame houses and barns. The Gresham family also sawed a large portion of the lumber used in the later construction of the factory and other buildings.

A village, Gresham's Mills, sprang up. A blacksmith shop, a cotton gin, and a general store were built. The settlers were adjusting to their new homes; and progress was starting to show, especially at Gresham's Mills.

About four miles southwest of Gresham's Mills was the home of Robert Lowry. Located here were bay trees and clear springs in profusion. Lowry operated a store in which the first post office in that vicinity was established in 1844. The post office was called Bay Springs, and Robert Lowry served as postmaster. When he moved to Carrollville in 1845, the post office was moved to Gresham's Mills without a change of name. The budding trade center on Mackey's Creek was thereafter called Bay Springs. James F. Gresham then became the postmaster of Bay Springs.