

Milling About

News from the Friends of Peirce Mill

Summer 2012



Rock Creek Park Heritage Day, October 15, 2011



The ribbon is cut! L to R, Adam Sieminski, President, Friends of Peirce Mill; Steve Whitesell, Regional Director, National Park Service; Richard Abbott, Friends of Peirce Mill; Tara Morrison, Superintendent, Rock Creek Park; Mary Cheh, Member for Ward 3, DC Council.

The reopening of Peirce Mill was celebrated in grand style on a sunny Saturday in October. Large crowds attended the event, jointly staged by the Friends of Peirce Mill and the National Park Service. Throughout the day, visitors enjoyed living history demonstrations, musical performances, and talks about the history and technology of the mill. In the afternoon, visitors were welcomed in remarks by David Hayes, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior; Steve Whitesell, Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service; Tara Morrison, Superintendent of Rock Creek Park, and DC Councilmember Mary Cheh. Richard Abbott, founder of the Friends of Peirce Mill, was honored with the presentation of a memorial plaque. There followed the ceremonial cutting of the ribbon to open the mill. Inside, visitors watched the grinding of corn, the first time the mill had operated since the machinery failed in April 1993.



The doors of the mill are open to receive visitors. FOPM member Aury Fernandez (R) is one of the first.



Colvin Run Miller Mason Maddox demonstrates Peirce Mill machinery to visitors.

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Visit us on the Internet at www.peircemill-friends.org

The Friends of Peirce Mill, Inc., is a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia. It has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

Reception at the Still House, October 13, 2011



Members and supporters of Peirce Mill got an advance look at the restored mill on Thursday evening, October 13, following a reception at the “Peirce Still House,” the beautifully restored building across Tilden Street from the mill, now the home of Cathy Carlson and Tom Galloway. Cathy and Tom have become strong supporters of the Friends of Peirce Mill and of our efforts to restore the mill to full operating condition. They offered the reception as a way of thanking our friends and benefactors, and encouraging their further support of our efforts.

At the event, Adam Sieminski, President of the Friends, made opening remarks and introduced several key individuals, including David Hayes, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior; Steve Whitesell, Director, National Capital Region, National Park Service; Julia Washburn, NPS Associate Director, Interpretation and Education; and Tara Morrison, Superintendent, Rock Creek Park. Representing the DC government were Councilmembers Mary Cheh and Muriel Bowser. Local Advisory Neighborhood Association ANC 3F representatives were Adam Tope and Bob Summersgill. Those attending from among our community of donor organizations were: Knight Kiplinger, The Kiplinger Foundation; Mrs. Dorothy Nagle, National Society of the Colonial Dames of America; and Brian Barr, Hillwood Museum. Also welcomed were officials of firms involved in the planning and execution of the restoration: Joseph and Tanya Matthews, The TMG Group; Baird Smith, Quinn Evans Architects; Kirk Mettam, Robert Silman Associates; Ward Bucher, Bucher/Borges Group; and Steve Ortado, Historic Structures. A special guest was Cameron Peirce, a descendant of the Peirce family, who operates a wheat and corn farm in Kansas. Mr. Peirce donated a shipment of his own wheat and corn for the initial operation of the mill.

New officers for the Friends of Peirce Mill

Our president, Adam Sieminski, has just been appointed by the White House to the position of Administrator, Energy Information Administration, Department of Energy, and has received Senate confirmation of the appointment. At a recent Friends board meeting, Adam told board members that the appointment made

it necessary for him to resign from the Presidency of the Friends of Peirce Mill, since the law requires that he have no legal connection with another Federal agency, in this case the National Park Service. The board regretfully accepted his resignation and congratulated him on his new job. Tom Blackburn, the current Vice President, agreed to take over as President, at least until the next annual meeting. Our newest board member, Quentin Looney, agreed to serve as Vice President for the same period.

Student visits kick off education program

Students from four Washington schools visited Peirce Mill in late May and early June, kicking off the educational program that the Friends of Peirce Mill have dreamed about for years as the mill was restored

The students from John Eaton and Bancroft elementary schools, and the YuYing charter school, were transported to the mill in buses arranged for by the National Park Service (Washington Latin School attended on its own). After a brief overview by park rangers and FOPM Program Manager Steve Dryden, the students entered the mill through the back door, were welcomed by miller Justin Flipowski, and saw the wooden gears turning and corn meal coming down the chute from the millstones. Ranger Tony Linforth provided the facts, and then led the group upstairs to learn about how grain is ground and about the concepts of gravity and waterpower. The students left by the front door, and had a chance to operate hand-power grinders and examine ground grains at the adjoining Peirce Barn, explained by Rangers Maggie Zadorozny and Jeanne Minor.

“The program was outstanding” said Eileen Langholtz, enrichment coordinator at Eaton. “Ranger Tony had a great handle on what to point out at the mill and involved the students in learning how the mill works by asking them clear, concrete questions.” Pamela Scarano, a teacher at Bancroft, said: “It was great because Justin was there to run the mill ... the kids were really able to see how the mill was working.” Mr. L. Tsao, a homeschooling parent who also attended along with Bancroft, sent us an email with this praise: “We very much enjoyed learning the history and processes at the mill. The volunteer docent, miller, and rangers made the experience interesting and educational for parents/teachers and



children/students alike. We look forward to returning to the mill during our studies of American history.”

The visits coincided with the planting of the first three apple trees in the project to restore part of the Peirce orchard. FOPM will involve students in the care and cultivation of the dwarf trees, for lessons in nutrition, 19th century farm life and plant reproduction.

The apple orchard

Members might have seen the piece in the Health and Science section of the Washington Post on May 22 entitled “Restoration Project Bears Fruit”, a clever play on words that announced our plans to restore the Peirce’s apple orchard adjacent to the mill. Students from the Harriet Tubman Elementary School will help with the planting this month of an initial three Winesap apple trees, the type of tree grown by the Peirces in the 19th century. Plans are to expand the orchard in the years to come, and possibly even produce apple cider as a demonstration. Hard apple cider was a popular drink in the 1800s when good quality drinking water was hard to come by. Apparently, this became a profitable sideline for the Peirce family, in addition to the grist mill. The Peirces also operated a distillery and produced apple brandy. *[See above story on the event held at the Peirce Still House.]*

Recruiting a miller for Peirce Mill

The National Park Service recruiting process for the Miller position at Peirce Mill continues at this writing. Although the miller position remains vacant, Tony Linforth has been hired to fill the position of Interpretive Ranger and is currently stationed at the mill. Tony, who was formerly on the staff of Acadia National Park in Maine, has received training in milling practices at the George Washington Grist Mill. In the interim, Rock Creek Park has been fortunate to have the temporary services of millers from two local operating grist mills: Mason Maddox from Colvin Run and Steve Bashore from the GW Grist Mill. More recently, a qualified miller from the latter mill, Justin Flipowski, has begun serving as temporary miller.



Alice Waters visits Peirce Mill

Alice Waters, the renowned American chef, activist and author, and owner of the Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley, California, visited Peirce Mill on January 19, 2012. The visit was arranged by Joan Nathan, a DC resident and well-known food historian, writer and author. Hosting the visit for the Friends of

Peirce Mill were President Adam Sieminski, Program Manager Steve Dryden, and board member Quentin Looney. Ranger Ricardo Perez, shown here with Ms. Waters, represented Rock Creek Park. Ms. Waters is a pioneer of a culinary philosophy that maintains that cooking should be based on the finest and freshest seasonal ingredients that are produced sustainably and locally. She is a passionate advocate for a food economy that is “good, clean, and fair.” Over the course of nearly forty years, Chez Panisse has helped create a community of scores of local farmers and ranchers whose dedication to sustainable agriculture assures the restaurant a steady supply of fresh and pure ingredients. As might be expected, there was a lively discussion during her visit about wholesome foods, water-powered gristmills and orchards! The visit was featured in the spring 2012 issue of *Flavor Magazine*.

A brief history of Chapman’s Mill

The Chapman family built mills on this site starting in 1742. John Chapman built the present structure in 1858, probably on an older foundation, and later enlarged it to 5½ stories. Quartzite from a quarry uphill was transported on temporary trestles. The site featured a railroad, an early turnpike to Alexandria, and a “never failing stream” that made Chapman’s Mill an early and successful merchant mill in Prince Williams County. In 1860 the mill had two run of stones for wheat, another for corn, and another for plaster (ground limestone for fertilizer). Annual production that year was 666 barrels of flour, 28,800 barrels of meal, and 200 tons of plaster.

The Civil War entangled the mill in some surprising twists and turns including sniper posts, a meat distribution center, and the burning of the mill and tons of meat to keep it from the other side. The mill played a significant role in the Second Battle of Manassas. The struggle apparently drove John Chapman insane and the five generation Chapman era ended.

After some failed auction attempts, Robert Beverly and son William purchased and rehabilitated the mill. By 1880 it was operating 8 to 12 hours a day as a limestone grinding mill. The overshot wheel, 6 feet wide and 27 feet high, produced 27 horsepower. After the turn of the century, several owners installed roller mill equipment and once more ground flour and corn meal, up to 100 barrels per day in the 1940s. The last owner, Walter P. Chrysler, stopped the operation, possibly over a dispute with the FDA over sanitary regulations.

Interstate 66 planners were ready to obliterate the mill. Local action got the route shifted slightly to protect the site. An apparent arson in 1998 destroyed the roof and interior.

Looking Back



Chapman's Mill, 1933

Thoroughfare Gap, Virginia

It catches the eye of most travelers on I-66 between Haymarket and The Plains: the burnt out ruins of an impressive stone structure. The remains of Chapman's Mill, later known as Beverley's Mill, date to 1858 and claim to be the largest stacked stone structure in the U. S. (HABS). Some kind of water powered mill operated on the site from 1742 until 1951, outlasting most of its east coast peers by many years.

At this location, known as Thoroughfare Gap, Broad Run cuts between the Bull Run Mountains and the Pond Mountains, heads southeast into Lake Manassas, and eventually joins the Occoquan River. The gap was a thoroughfare between the Shenandoah Valley and the port of Alexandria from colonial times and continues that usage today with a railroad, I-66, and VA-55 or John Marshall Highway. When Fauquier County was split from Prince William County in 1759, the mill was part of the county border line.

The Turn the Mill Around Campaign (www.chapmansmill.org) is actively working to preserve the site, sponsor archeological studies, and enhance the site into a community-based park. Their website includes history, events, and visitor information. The mill is located in Bull Run Mountains State Natural Area Preserve. It is accessible from VA-55 (which parallels I-66) at Turner Road – north on Turner, west on Beverley Mill Drive to the parking lot at the end. Also in the area, Beverley's Mill Road runs north from US-29 to VA-55 but without direct access to the mill site.



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