

Milling About

News from the Friends of Peirce Mill

Winter 2010

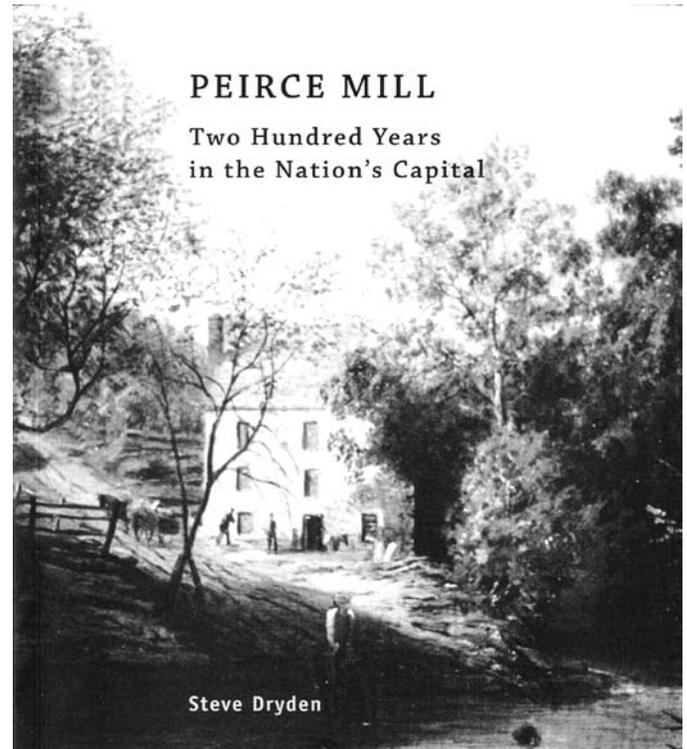


New Book Published on Peirce Mill

Steve Dryden, our Vice President, has just had his book, *Peirce Mill; Two Hundred Years in the Nation's Capital*, published by the Bergamot Press. The book recounts the fascinating history of the Peirce family, its Quaker background, and its settlement in the Washington area beginning in the 1790s. Over the following century, the Peirces and the Shoemakers, two families connected by marriage, were intimately involved in the commercial and political activities of Washington. They manufactured flour and brandy in and around Peirce Mill, operated a horticulture business [at Linnaean Hill], engaged in real estate dealings, and held civic office. Another side of their story has to do with slavery -- the Peirces were one of the largest slaveholders during this period. One could say that the story Steve tells encapsulates the history of Washington DC in the 19th century.

The book is currently on sale for \$15.99 at Amazon.com, the Politics and Prose bookstore in D.C., the Rock Creek Park Nature Center, the Old Stone House in Georgetown, the National Building Museum and the DC Historical Society. Members and supporters of the Friends of Peirce Mill are strongly encouraged to get a copy.

Publication of the book has engendered some very welcome publicity about the Friends and our restoration project. We hope that FOPM members and supporters read or heard the coverage, but in case you missed it, there were articles in the Northwest Current (December 9), the Examiner [December 6] and the John Kelly column of December 17 in the Washington Post. Then Steve was a guest on the Kojo Nnamdi show on WAMU on January 14, along with Rock Creek Park Ranger Ron Harvey and Architectural Historian Don Hawkins. Copies of the articles are available by emailing abbott1229@verizon.net.

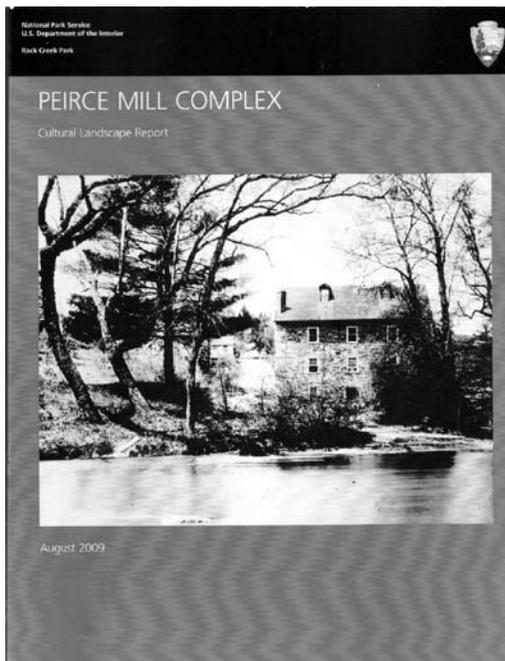


Rock Creek Park Superintendent Retires

Superintendent Adrienne Coleman retired effective January 1. Cindy Cox has taken over as Acting Superintendent. Cindy has been serving as Assistant Superintendent and has always been very supportive of our efforts to restore Peirce Mill. It will be a pleasure to work with her in the coming months.

Inside: NPS Planning For Peirce Mill / Building and Installing the Milling Machinery

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

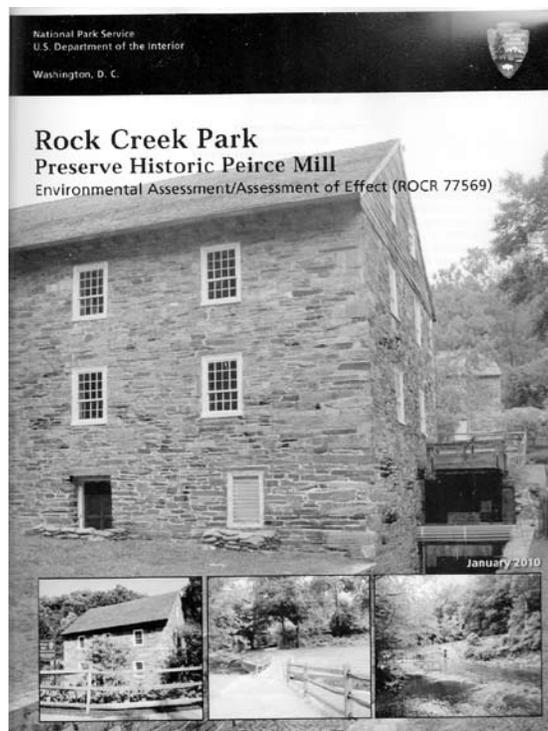


NPS Planning for Peirce Mill

In the last issue of *Milling About*, we told you about a comprehensive plan for the rehabilitation of Peirce Mill and the surrounding area being prepared by the National Park Service. The planning process must follow a lengthy procedure prescribed by NPS regulations – a somewhat tedious bureaucratic procedure but one that assures that the recommended treatment that emerges protects the historical integrity of the property. We’re reporting on this in some detail because it will have a major impact on completion of our restoration project, and on the eventual appearance of Peirce Mill.

First, a Cultural Landscape Report prepared for the NPS in the summer of 2009 by Quinn Evans Architects (see photo above) recommended several alternative treatments to the mill (the “historic core”) and the surrounding areas. These alternatives were discussed in a three-day “Value Analysis” session in July attended by NPS officials from Rock Creek Park, the National Capital Region, and the Denver Service Center; along with representatives of the DC Historic Preservation Office, the Fine Arts Commission, and board members of the Friends of Peirce Mill. The alternatives included some major landscaping changes around the mill, as well as improved access pathways to and around the building, additional structural repairs to the upper floors, and the water system to power the water wheel. This water system was fully designed last year by architects retained by the Friends, but was incorporated into the overall site plan because it was exterior to the building and required changes to the landscape.

The next step in the process was to prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) of the four alternative treatments to the mill site that emerged from the earlier studies. The EA, shown in the photo below, has just been completed. It is now open to public comment until February 17, 2010. You can look at the document and comment on it by going to <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>, choose Rock Creek Park and click on Open for Comment towards the top of the page, which brings up “Preserve Historic Peirce Mill”. Clicking on that gives access to the entire 138-page document; comments on it can be entered by going to the box “Comment on Document” at the left. It is well worth looking at the introductory sections, and especially Alternative B (Preferred Alternative) starting on page 20. You will see that some rather radical changes are proposed to the topography around the mill. It is proposed to remove the parking lot and recreate the “mill yard” by lowering the entire area to its original elevation, thus removing the slope down to the mill building created when the parking lot was built in 1936. Construction of the parking lot above the former ground level created a slope down to the mill building; water draining down the slope toward the foundations eventually seeped into the building and caused rotting of the of the floor joists ends that were inserted in pockets in the stone foundation wall. This necessitated a lengthy and complicated repair procedure, just recently completed. Another welcome proposal is to create a bus parking area just uphill from the Barn, providing a safe and convenient place for school buses to unload.



Building and Installing the Milling Machinery

John O'Rourke and Gus Kiorpes, our contractors for rebuilding the wooden milling machinery, have been very busy last fall and this winter. Previous issues of Milling About have shown readers the new main shaft and the attached pit gear or wheel in place in the mill. Installation of these two important parts was video filmed last year and can be seen by going to our website, www.peircemill-friends.org.

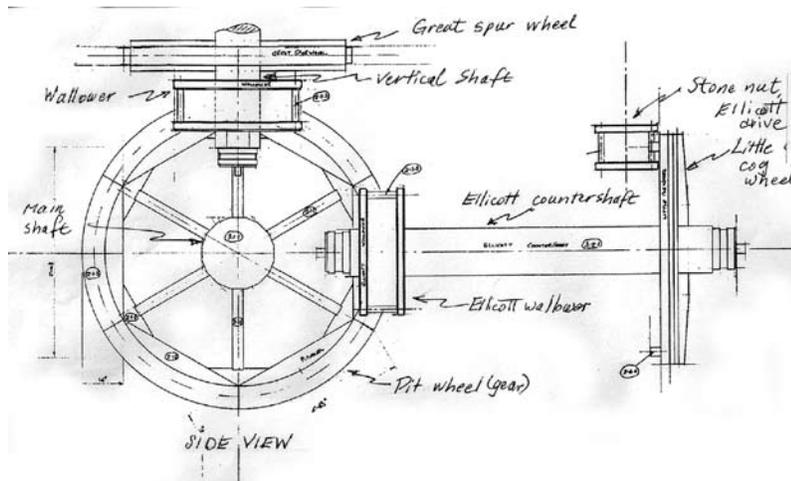


John working on the great spur wheel

John and Gus are now fabricating and installing equipment that will be linked to and powered by the shaft and pit gear. Several key pieces of machinery have been fabricated and brought to the mill for finishing and installing. Other pieces are still being worked on in John and Gus's shop in Port Republic, MD.



Gus working on the vertical shaft



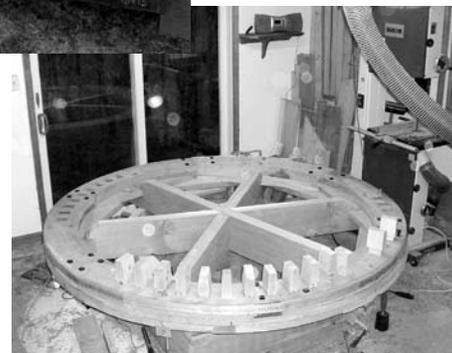
How the pieces all fit together is interesting stuff – for those of our readers who are mechanically inclined.

The drawing shows a side view looking from the basement level toward the outer wall of the mill. The end of the main shaft appears at the center of the drawing. It passes through the north wall of the mill and will have the water wheel mounted on it. The pit wheel, attached to the main shaft, drives a wallower gear that is fixed to and powers the vertical shaft. Just above it, also fixed to the vertical shaft, is the “great spur wheel” that engages two other gears (not shown) that power two sets of millstones. Peirce Mill is unique in that it has a separate drive system (called the “Ellicott drive”) that powers the third set of millstones through the Ellicott wallower gear, a countershaft, and the little cog wheel.

The pictures here show the nearly completed parts mentioned above, including the great spur wheel, vertical shaft, little cog wheel, and countershaft.

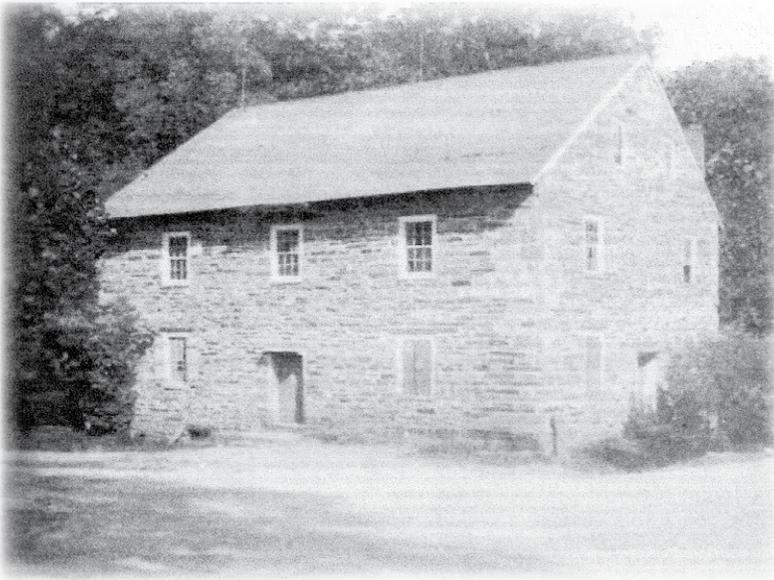


The counter shaft



Partially built little cog wheel

d o w n s t r e a m



This is Peirce Mill in 1897, shortly after it ceased operations. Note that the ground level around the mill is at the front door level. When the parking lot and bridge were constructed in the 1930s, well above the level shown here, it left the mill in a basin and created a serious drainage problem. The plans currently under review, described in this issue of *Milling About*, are intended to correct this problem.



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