

# Milling About

News from the Friends of Peirce Mill

Winter/Spring 2005



## A Note from the President

As our readers will have noted, this is the first issue of *Milling About* we've issued since last fall. We delayed publication in order to include news and photos about the water wheel removal, a very interesting job that we turned into a "media event". Originally scheduled for February, then delayed by snow, it was then rescheduled for March, only to be delayed again by heavy rain that made the ground around the mill too soft for the heavy crane provided by the National Park Service. It finally happened on April 7, as you will read in the following article. You will also read in this issue about our fundraising activities. This is our primary focus for the rest of the year. We must raise - or secure commitments for - funds on the order of \$200,000 if we are to keep the project on schedule and move to the next phase of the project - making and installing new and repaired milling machinery. We believe that this is an attainable goal. Stay tuned!

*Richard Abbott*

## Removing the Water Wheel

April 7 was an exciting day at Peirce Mill! Maybe you read about it in the *Washington Post (District Extra)* of April 14. In a joint operation between teams from Rock Creek Park Maintenance and our contractor, Steve Ortado's Historic Structures, most of the damaged water wheel was removed.



*Lifting out the badly damaged front section of the wheel*

At the event, twice postponed by weather, the two teams first cut out and braced one quadrant of the wheel, then lifted it out with a National Park Service crane. The segment will be preserved as a memento of the 1960s-era wheel. Then other parts of the wheel were cut away and lifted out, leaving behind only the bottom portion that remains buried in mud at the bottom of the tail race. Finally the water wheel shaft was removed by first cutting off and lifting out the outer end of the shaft with



*Lifting out one segment of the water wheel after bracing*

attached bearing, then pulling the rest of the shaft through the wall, leaving only the rotted inner end and bearing inside the mill.

Steve Ortado and his crew will soon be removing this inner portion of the shaft, along with the broken pieces of the big pit gear that had been attached to the main shaft. The accompanying pictures show the main steps in the removal process. Those of you with access to the internet may also have looked at the entire series of 50 pictures that we posted on "Ofoto" and informed you about by e-mail.



*The water wheel as it looked after removal of the segment*



*Installing new right front corner post*

our engineers, Robert Silman Associates, on the work accomplished to date, and a second report that will detail the planned joist repair and replacement.

The dam, which we call the “Teahouse Dam” since it was built in 1905 when the mill was serving as a teahouse, is the last remaining obstacle to fish migration up Rock Creek, the rest having been removed during the past year. A fishway (sometimes called a “fish ladder”) to allow the fish to bypass the dam will be built starting in June, so that the fish will be able to migrate on their own next year. The objective is to restore spawning of these species (herring, alewife and shad) in the

upper reaches of Rock Creek that has been blocked for many years by vehicle fords, sewer lines and other obstacles.

Once the fish have spawned in these areas, the location will be “imprinted” on the young fish and they will return to the location as adults to spawn. Plans are to install a video camera at a window on the fish ladder so

that visitors can watch the migration on a monitor installed in Peirce Barn.

## Work Inside the Mill

We reported in the Fall 2004 issue of *Milling About* that Gus Kiorpes and John O’Rourke were making repairs to the “hurst frame”, the heavy timber framework that holds the milling machinery. Gus and John, working through October and November, completed most of the needed repairs. This exacting work involved replacing a number of 12” by 12” posts and beams with new ones of seasoned white oak, and in other cases correcting previous improperly made repairs by inserting “false tenons” to lock vertical posts into horizontal members. (NB: It would take more space than we have here to explain what a false tenon is. But if any of you are interested, let us know and we’ll provide an explanation!) Gus and John plan to complete the last few repairs to the hurst frame this spring and summer.

Last fall, Steve Ortado and crew completed all repairs to the columns and beams supporting the floors of the mill, as well as repairs to several floor joists. The remaining work on this phase of the project – replacement or repair of some 15 to 20 floor joists at the basement level – will be undertaken this summer. Start of this work awaits approval by Rock Creek Park of a detailed report completed in March by



*Start of the fish transfer from creekside below the dam*

## The “Herring Aid” Event

The D.C. Department of Fisheries and the National Park Service organized a fascinating event in Rock Creek on April 20. Dubbed “Herring Aid,” the event involved the capture of herring and related fish species in the pool below the dam adjacent to Peirce Mill, then their transfer by a “bucket brigade” of some 100 volunteers to a point up about 300 yards up Rock Creek, above the remains of the boulder dam that once served the mill.



*The “bucket brigade” of students and other volunteers*

## Fund-Raising Activities

Our fund-raising committee (Blackburn, Dryden, Abbott) has been very active during the past four months. Nine grant applications with a total requested amount of \$175,000 were submitted to foundations. An additional \$20,000 Challenge Grant from the National Park Service is pending. These requests, and an additional one to be submitted in May, are expected to generate between \$75,000 and \$100,000 in grants. By far the biggest pending grant, not included in the above, is a request from the Save America's Treasures program for a matching grant of \$292,000 that we submitted on February 1. Our proposal is a strong one and we feel that chances for a grant are good, provided Congress votes the necessary funds for this \$30 million annual program. Were we to be awarded a grant, we would then have to raise a matching amount over three years to receive the full grant. If we succeed in doing this, we will have funded roughly three-quarters of the project cost, enough to complete everything but the water system. However, currently we are concentrating on our target of raising \$200,000 in cash grants and future commitments during the current year.



FOPM Board of Directors. L to R: Steve Dryden, Richard Abbott, Philip Gaudette, Tom Blackburn, Sheila Ploger, David Lyman (Note: Board member Gene Hines was unable to attend.)

## Meet the FOPM Board of Directors

We thought you might like to know more about the folks who are running things here at the Friends of Peirce Mill. Here is a picture of us at our November 2004 board meeting.

We'll be profiling one of these hard-working people in each forthcoming issue of *Milling About*. We start with our Vice President, Steve Dryden. Steve has been with us from the beginning

and has made major contributions to our organizations, most recently by taking the lead on our important grant request to the Save America's Treasures program (see above). Our board meetings have been held for several years at Steve's former office at the Audubon Naturalist Society on Jones Mill Road in Montgomery County.

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**Steve Dryden** is a writer and public relations consultant specializing in historic preservation and the environment. He grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and has a special interest in the connections between the "forgotten old families" of the Washington area and today's suburban landscapes. Among his current projects is a map commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 90,000-acre Montgomery County (Md.) Agricultural Reserve. Steve has worked as media relations director for the Audubon Naturalist Society of the Central Atlantic States, and is on the board of Fairfax Trails and Streams, a nonprofit group leading efforts to complete a network of hiking trails in Fairfax. During his journalistic career, he wrote from Europe, the Middle East, and Washington for the *Washington Post*, the *International Herald Tribune*, *Business Week*, *Bloomberg News* and *United Press International*. He is the author of "Trade Warriors", a history of the White House Trade Representative's Office (Oxford University Press, 1995).



# d o w n s t r e a m



School children crowd the first floor of Peirce Mill in this photo from the 1970s. The mill has long been a popular field trip for local schools. Several members of Friends of Peirce Mill remember how fascinated the children were by how the water wheel turned and brought the gears and equipment to life. That is one of the main reasons that we want to return the mill to operation once again.

National Park Service historic photos of Peirce Mill



4305 38th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20016

