

Milling About

News from the Friends of Peirce Mill

Winter 2007



Peirce Mill Gets a New Roof



The first section of new shingles is installed.

Work is going on both inside and outside these days at the mill! Rock Creek Park has been able to use some year-end FY06 funds to pay for installation of a new roof, as the pictures show. These were taken on January 23 and 24 as the roofers worked in very cold conditions. For the first time in many years the attic was flooded with daylight!

Rock Creek Park maintenance staff covered all the items stored there with plastic sheeting to protect them from damage.



View of the attic with the old shingles removed.

Park officials inform us that funds will also be available for “re-pointing” of stone walls at the basement level, and repairs to all 23 windows in the mill. The Park will contract directly with Steve Ortado for the window work, which Steve and his crew will carry out this spring. Getting these three important jobs done is doubly welcome because, first of all, they will not impact our budget and, second, they are a demonstration of support from Rock Creek Park that is visible to the general public.

Repairs to the Mill Floors



As we noted in the last issue, Steve Ortado and crew are working to repair damaged floor joists beneath the main floor of the mill. The picture shows Steve Ortado (right) and son Matt placing supports under the floor prior to removing additional floorboards.

The work has gone more slowly than we had anticipated because the choice of repair method depended on a decision about retaining the beam supporting the joist ends—a beam installed in the 1960s when rot in the joist ends was first noted. The decision was made in December to retain the beam, which simplifies and speeds up the repair work. Steve will proceed with the work, quadrant-by-quadrant so that access to the mill for other work will be possible at all times.

Work on the pumped water system held up

Since our cover story in the last issue about planning for the water system, Bucher/Borges completed a preliminary plan for a system utilizing a modification of the old system, with the addition of a short headrace to store enough water to start the water wheel turning and maintain the flow with the pumps operating. The plan was submitted to the Park for approval and reviewed with Park officials on September 20 and again on October 31. It was only after numerous communications from the Friends, stressing the urgency of the matter, that the Park responded on February 7 with a request for more information. The situation is complicated by the pending DDOT (DC Department of Transportation) grant to Rock Creek Park for improvements to the bicycle path and landscaping around Peirce Mill. The Park and DDOT have been unable to reach agreement on the terms of the grant, with the result that our project was held up. In order to meet the Park's request, we asked the Bucher/Borges team to proceed with the design of the pumps and piping. Our hope is that with the submission of that additional information, most likely by the end of February, that the Park will approve the design, allowing Bucher/Borges to complete design work and for drawings of the wooden flume to be prepared by Millwright Derek Ogden.

The State of the National Parks

I suspect that many of our members and donors are well aware of the serious budget shortfalls within the National Park Service over the past several years and its effect on maintenance of park facilities, including Peirce Mill. You might have seen the article by John Mitchell in the October 2006 issue of National Geographic, for example, which reported on a White House proposal to cut the National Park Service budget by 5% in FY 2007. This proposal to cut funding even further prompted an influential organization, the National Parks Conservation Association, to mount a campaign that asked people to contact their representatives in Congress: to renew a commitment to our national parks; to restore the health of the parks; reinvest in them; reinvigorate their management capacity; ensure that the parks have active research and current science to inform decisions; and ensure that the park system continues to grow and evolve to represent nationally significant landscapes and the full range and diversity of American history.....

The Bush administration appears to have responded to these concerns. On February 7, the President, on a visit to the Shenandoah National Park, announced that his administration was proposing a \$258 million increase (14.3% above FY 2006 levels) in the FY 2008 budget for the NPS. It would add \$50 million to various maintenance accounts, and would allow the NPS to hire nearly 500

permanent employees, 1000 seasonal maintenance employees, and several thousand seasonal rangers. If passed by Congress, this budget would be the best news in years for the nation's National Parks.

Previously, the administration took other actions affecting the National Parks, including the appointment of a new Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne, last summer, and a new Park Service Director, Mary Bomar, in November. The President also announced a ten-year Centennial Challenge to restore the National Parks in time for the 100th anniversary of the NPS in 2016. Under its terms, the Federal Government would match donations from the philanthropic organizations and private citizens up to \$100 million in each of the next ten years.

At this time it is too early to judge the effect of these changes but a number of knowledgeable people remain sceptical. One is Tom Kiernan, who heads the National Parks Conservation Association, an independent membership organization chartered by Congress in 1919 to play a watchdog role on the National Park Service. In the Winter 2007 issue of the organization's magazine, National Parks, Mr. Kiernan asks people to sign a pledge to help fix the parks. He says that this is "a task for the Administration, Congress, philanthropists, communities, families, and individuals to undertake together, in the common cause of showcasing American pride, vision, and community." Mr. Kiernan asks us to visit www.npca.org/fixourparks and find out what you can do to help. The pledge you are asked to sign states, among other things, that you will contact Congress,

the President and parks official to request additional funding for the parks, and will write a letter to your local paper in support of national parks.

What does it all mean for Peirce Mill? Too early to tell. Potentially at least, it means that Rock Creek Park's staff shortages, including maintenance personnel, would be corrected, leading to faster action on our requests for approval of work plans and maintenance work at the mill. The matching feature of the Centennial Challenge is something we have sought from the founding of the Friends of Peirce Mill – a Federal match for funds we have raised privately. Had such a program been in place, more than \$1.2 million would now be available to restore and operate Peirce Mill. Whether this becomes a reality in time to benefit our project is an open question at this time.



Milling on the web

Have a look at our web site — www.peircemill-friends.org. This issue of *Milling About* and previous issues are posted there. If you need a refresher on the history of the mill, and on our restoration project, they are there too. We're also posting a series of pictures of the new roof being installed. If you're talking to friends about your involvement in this important project and want them to know more about it, tell them to go to the web site!



Meet Your Board: Philip Gaudette

Philip Gaudette wrote his first computer program in 1968 in high school in Bellaire, Texas. Nearly four decades later, he is still at it.

Apparently, he is a slow learner. Currently, he is Owner/Computer Scientist at Noether LLC. The company is named in honor of a remarkable mathematician, Emmy Noether, who made enormously creative contributions in the 1930s to math, physics, and theories of importance to computer science, which had not even been invented at the time. (For a brief article on her life and career, go to wikipedia.org and search Emmy Noether.)

Philip has lived for many years up the hill from Peirce Mill on the east side of the creek. Before the main shaft broke in the 1990s, he enjoyed the privilege of standing inside that huge wooden machine while in operation. So when Richard Abbott published his editorial piece in the *Washington Post*, it seemed logical to get involved.

His main issue is the headrace connection to the creek upstream: The dam has nothing to do with the historical operation of the mill. The last renovation featured city water emanating from a hole underneath the parking lot. We can't restore or demonstrate how water from the creek got to the mill in the Peirce era. But he would like our work to use headrace design, landscaping features, and signage to tell that part of the story.

Fund raising progress

Since the last issue of *Milling About* in June, we have received another \$80,000 in grants and reached another milestone—over \$600,000 raised to date! Cash grants and donations totaled \$586,000, and in-kind donations came to \$22,000, for a total of \$608,000. Of the \$80,000 in new grants, \$55,000 came from the Marpat Foundation. This is the fourth grant from this organization and the total of \$132,500 received to date makes Marpat our largest contributor so far. The other \$25,000 came from the Clark Construction Company, Bethesda MD. Clark generously donated these funds to help compensate for the loss of a potential \$50,000 “neighborhood amenity” grant we would have received had Clark's planned high-rise apartment on Tilden Street been approved by the Zoning Commission last fall. Our grant application to the Save America's Treasures program—our third try—was again rejected. Over the next three months, we plan to submit grant applications totaling \$150,000 to foundations that have regularly supported us over the years. We have also received grants totaling \$6,500 to be used for the book on the history of the Peirce family that will be written by Steve Dryden.

d o w n s t r e a m



In the 1800s, Thomas Blagden operated a pair of mills upstream from Peirce Mill and a mill-stead that covered much of the Crestwood neighborhood. The family home, since demolished, was just east of 16th Street. The Blagden Mills, also called the Argyle Mills, were demolished in the early 1900s during construction of Beach Drive.

