

MILL MUSINGS

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WORK WEEKENDS

Mark your calendars for Saturday March 3rd and Saturday March 10th. We are looking for volunteers on these work days to help us prepare for reopening the mill and museum on March 15th. There will be plenty of indoor cleaning that will need to be done, as well as arranging new inventory in the store. Weather permitting, grounds work will include scraping the gravel road below the mill, picking up sticks and debris, working in and around the pavilion, and raking off the trailer site between the cabin and main road. We will also be trimming limbs and planting bulbs. If you are available to help, please let us know ahead of time and plan to bring work gloves. Lunch will be provided. Call (931) 469-7161 and leave a message if you will be able to assist us on either of these days. As always, we appreciate your assistance.

WINTER RENOVATIONS

With the arrival of the equipment from the former American Textile History Museum (ATHM), we have been preparing space to showcase the new pieces. Since we are no longer milling grain commercially, we decided to move out some unused equipment to be able to open another exhibit room on the second floor.

Five large and deteriorating wooden grain bins had to be dismantled and removed. An 8-foot long flour bolter that hadn't been used in nearly 40 years, was taken down from the ceiling and carefully sent through the trap door to the first floor. The grain cleaner, grits separator, and dust collectors soon followed. The chain hoists were put to good use for many days. Our sincere thanks are offered to those brave souls who didn't mind getting dusty (very, very, dusty) to help with the demolition. Museum members Robyn Glazner and Kyle and Betsy Dugger put in many hours helping John and Janie with the dismantling, moving, and hoisting. Everything proceeded without incident, despite several white knuckle hoists downstairs.



Kyle Dugger strapping down bolter in second floor ceiling



John hoists down bolter through trap door to first floor

PLANS FOR THE NEW EXHIBIT AREA

The area being cleared will be used to establish an exhibit showing how textiles were processed in the 1830's and 1840's, before most small factories in the South had installed powered, industrial machinery. The earlier cotton and woolen mill on the Falls Mill site, built in the early 1840's, would have probably incorporated equipment similar to the machines we will display, and hopefully operate. The only machine in this group to have been powered by water during that period was the carding machine. The example we were donated from ATHM is believed to have been manufactured in the 1830's, and we plan to re-clothe the cylinders and return it to operating condition.

Wool slivers produced from this machine were discharged in 2-foot lengths. Before carding machines were capable of condensing slivers into continuous strands for spinning into yarn, a peculiar hand turned machine had to be operated between the carding machine and the spinning equipment. This machine was known as a slubbing billy (producing slightly twisted slubs or rovings from the carded slivers), and became obsolete in larger factories by the late 1830's when carding machine condensers were patented. As a result, the slubbing billy was discarded, and virtually lost to history except for a few old drawings and a detailed description of operation in an 1819 encyclopedia. There is said to be one surviving slubbing billy in a textile mill in Wales, but photos indicate a different machine than those pictured in the old woodcuts. ATHM had one original billy, the only one known worldwide outside Wales, but it was in bad condition and was shipped to North Carolina following the dissolution of ATHM. However, they also had the movable carriage section of a second billy in good condition, and it was donated to our museum. We will need to build a wooden frame for the machine to make it operable. When this is accomplished, it will be the only working slubbing billy known in the world. We are very grateful to museum member Susan Church for donating cherry lumber to build the frame.

The spinning jenny, also a hand turned machine, was the factory equivalent of the home spinning wheel for about 70 years. It was capable of spinning multiple strands of yarn or thread by one operator. There are only about five original jennies surviving, all in Europe. John built a replica a few years ago and will place it in the new exhibit area as a companion machine to the billy. ATHM also donated what was known as a vertical spinning machine, this very rare example being made in New England in 1831 by Ebenezer Ware. These were manufactured in limited numbers for home use, since the standard jennies were too large to be used conveniently outside factories.

After the yarn was produced on the jenny, it was ready to be woven into cloth. We are planning to convert one of our old barn looms to what was called a fly shuttle loom, found in the textile mills before power looms became available. These were hand operated, but allowed the weaver to propel the yarn shuttle back and forth across the loom with a cord rather than using the slower method of passing it by hand.

As a final piece in the exhibit, we are placing the 1820's cloth shearing machine donated by ATHM. This is the earliest known machine of its kind, and was used to raise and shear the nap of the cloth passing through brushing and shearing rolls as the device was hand cranked. The machine is missing some parts, and we have been researching ways to replicate these parts and return the machine to operation.

These efforts are being funded by major donations from Kim Caulfield, Charles Taylor, and Dawna Zullo, by a grant from the Camp-Younts Foundation, and by many generous gifts from among our museum members and friends, for which we are very grateful.

MOBILE HOME REMOVAL

The mobile home near the main road on the Falls Mill property has been deteriorating for many years. The trailer was originally located by the dam and upper falls and was the home of Woodrow and Evelyn Crum, the couple who restored Falls Mill in the early 1970's. It was later moved to its present site and was home to our miller, William (Butch) Janey. In January, Butch moved out to his property at Lexie Crossroads, about 4 miles away. Travis Gamble came in early February to remove the trailer and clean up the site. Several trees threatening electric lines also had to be taken out. As soon as the ground dries, we can smooth the area and sow grass seed. The removal of the trailer has greatly improved the appearance of the grounds.



PLANS FOR THE TRAILER SITE

Once the former mobile home site is prepared, we are considering another possible bed and breakfast unit. Several of our regular guests have requested a cabin that is on one level and handicap accessible, so we are exploring options. One plan is to build a replica of the Caney Hollow log schoolhouse that was about three miles from the mill. It would be furnished as a one-room schoolhouse and could be used for educational and small group meeting purposes and perhaps as a wedding venue. We have a circa 1915 photo of the old schoolhouse that could be used as a guide for construction. We are now investigating the feasibility of locating logs for the building in the area and possibly obtaining remnants of the original schoolhouse, now in ruins. We are also considering adding a breezeway between the school building and a "schoolmaster's quarters," which could serve as a bed and breakfast facility.

THE DAY THE SQUIRREL WENT BERSERK

After celebrating a peaceful Christmas season with family and friends, we opened the log cabin bed and breakfast to prepare for the next guests, and discovered mayhem and destruction. A squirrel had pulled away the wire cage on the chimney cap and fallen through the chimney flue into the fireplace. Not being able to find its way out, the squirrel had panicked, knocking over lamps and tearing down curtains. It proceeded to try to chew its way out of both downstairs windows, destroying the wooden window frames in the process. It then chewed through three electric wires, and apparently was electrocuted, as Janie found its remains under a sofa cushion. The search was now on for replacement windows, which of course were nowhere to be found. We were told they could be ordered, but since it was between Christmas and New Years, they would not arrive for at least three weeks. We had guests before that time, so John in frustration decided to build the two windows from scratch. This took about a week and a half, but he was able to get them painted and installed just in time for the guests. He also had to rewire the cords, and Janie had to get a new satellite receiver. But the first thing accomplished was to remove the chimney cap and try, this time, to make it completely pest proof.

SECOND SATURDAY DEMO DAYS

Beginning in April, we have decided to offer several types of demonstrations on the second Saturday of each month. These will include blacksmith work, spinning and weaving, and a nineteenth century cowboy campsite. Occasional demonstrations may also include corn grinding, cotton ginning, and woodworking. Demonstrators will include Steve Walker, Carole and Gary Runyon and members of Fleece on the Duck Fiber Guild, Candy Albright, and Janie and John Lovett. Several of these skills are demonstrated regularly during pre-arranged group tours throughout tourist season, but the 2nd Saturday schedule will highlight the talents of several of our museum members. Also helping as volunteers, when available, are Lillian Holloway, Robyn and Jenny Glazner, and Kyle and Betsy Dugger. Walter Clement helps when parts or research are needed. And of course Bernie Schroer continues to volunteer his time and talents not only in woodworking but also in project development.

COTTON GIN

After extensive restoration, John has almost completed work on the museum's 1887 Pratt cotton gin. He is planning to take the new brush shaft he built to South Carolina in the spring to have it balanced. A visit to the abandoned Pratt factory in Prattville, Alabama, and the town's history museum and archives proved helpful, as did the donation of the remains of a Pratt gin condenser by Kevin Harbin of Seneca, SC. John had to build foundry patterns and have castings made for missing parts on the condenser, but it is nearly ready now. The purpose of the condenser was to take the cotton fibers blown off the gin and condense them into a batt of cotton. The gin and condenser have been mounted on a wagon, the wheels and axles of which were found near Tupelo, MS. This will make it possible to move the gin when it is ready for operation.

HIATUS FROM SORGHUM MAKING

As many of you know, we were not able to cook sorghum syrup this past season because cane aphids destroyed the crop. These have moved into our area within the past few years and are devastating to cane. They multiply so rapidly that natural controls don't seem to work. Chemicals have been approved for fodder sorghum but not syrup varieties, even though some large producers are spraying their crops anyway. We felt this was not healthy, as chemical residue is likely cooked down with the juice and may become more concentrated in the syrup. We don't know the future of our syrup making at this point. If we decide to pursue this again, we will indicate it on our Website.

IN MEMORIUM

We are always saddened to report the death of friends and museum supporters since the previous newsletter. In August 2017 our friend Edward Hill passed away. Ed was the father of museum member Dr. Micheal Hill, and was a World War II veteran. He was in the first wave at Normandy – a true American hero. In November 2017 Pauline Bradford passed away in Huntland, TN. She was the grandmother of four young women who worked for us in the past – Jacklyn and Rebekah George, Ashley Knoer, and Lindsey Knoer. We also lost Dr. James Gammill in December. Jim was another World War II veteran and spent most of his career as a psychoanalyst in Paris, France. Jim restored a very old house in Old Salem, TN near Falls Mill, where Janie and John lived for 16 months while completing their own home at the mill. Jim's house is now owned by Paul and Melissa Holloway and their family. Melissa just lost her father Holland "Dutch" Coulter of North Carolina. He was a former student and colleague of John Lovett, well respected by all who knew him. We extend our deepest sympathy to the families of these museum members, friends, and supporters. Janie also lost her uncle Charles Cahill in Memphis on November 25, 2017. "Uncle Charlie" was an accomplished musician and a friend to all who made his acquaintance.

Calendar of Events

- May 12 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00
Spinning. Weaving, Blacksmith, 1880's Cowboy Campsite
- June 9 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00
Spinning. Weaving, Blacksmith, 1880's Cowboy Campsite
- July 14 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00
Spinning. Weaving, Blacksmith, 1880's Cowboy Campsite
- August 11 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00
Spinning. Weaving, Blacksmith, 1880's Cowboy Campsite

September 8 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00 RSVP by August 27 (931) 469-7161

Membership Picnic 5:00-7:00 Bring a covered Dish

- October 13 2nd Saturday Demo Day 9:00-4:00
Spinning. Weaving, Blacksmith, 1880's Cowboy Campsite, Grain Milling

Lunch provided for all volunteers on work and demonstration days. RSVP to Falls Mill (931) 469-7161 one week prior to event day if you will be able to participate.

Watch the Contact and Calendar page of the Falls Mill web site for additional special events throughout the year!