

MILL MUSINGS

A Publication of the Museum of Power and Industry, Inc.

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2023 – A WHIRLWIND YEAR

Last year proved very significant for Falls Mill and The Museum of Power and Industry. We celebrated the 150th anniversary of the completion of the mill/textile factory with four special events, including the museum members' annual picnic on September 10. The picnic was catered by Marvin's Restaurant in Fayetteville and attended by about 90 friends of the museum. Gabe LaRose, Huntsville singer and guitarist, provided the musical entertainment. On October 14 we hosted a "schoolhouse day" at the mill, featuring programs at our one-room log schoolhouse. John, Christy Anderson, and Sunday Perkins conducted the programs in 1890s costumes. Steve Walker also was on hand with his cowboy/cowgirl presentation, as was Gary Runyon in the blacksmith shop. Gary's wife Carole demonstrated spinning that day on the front porch of the schoolhouse, and Crocia Roberson brought a collection of old time toys. The Flat Creek Dancers were again on hand to demonstrate their contra dances in nineteenth century style.

Also in 2023 we were able to acquire the two bordering lots, returning the hollow and center of the former "Fall Mills" village to one ownership for the first time in 91 years. This had been one of our longtime goals which we pursued for 39 years. Although it at times appeared hopeless, a chain of lucky events occurred in 2023 that made the purchases possible.



With the help of Kyle Dugger and his formatting software, we completed two books in 2023. The first was an updated edition of the history of Falls Mill, entitled *Falls Mill: A Legacy of Power and Industry*, first printed in 2005. Three new chapters and additional photos brought the story to the present. John also completed a smaller book detailing the acquisition and restoration of the museum's textile machinery collection, from 1987 to date. Both books were

printed by Starkey Printing Company in Chattanooga and are available for sale to benefit the museum.

We were notified that the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville had been chosen to administer funds allocated to help the struggling small museums throughout the state. This was designated a Capital Maintenance and Improvement Grant, so we applied and were successful in securing a grant to help rehabilitate the old Lucas house next to the mill. The house had been allowed to deteriorate markedly by the previous owners, as had the lot itself, so we debated whether to tear it down. The fact that it was the only remaining intact building (other than the mill) in the immediate vicinity, and the former residence of several generations of factory owners, encouraged us to pursue saving it. Local contractor and museum supporter John Bush provided an estimate for the work. The grant will pay for the exterior stabilization, including foundation and floor structure repair, roof replacement, front porch rebuilding, and mending of the siding. This work is planned to be completed by the end of June 2024. Following that, we will undertake a fund raising effort for the interior work, including re-furnishing the house with Victorian era antique furniture and fixtures. Several pieces have already been promised for this purpose. The house will serve as a visitor center and venue, and will highlight the history of the Fall Mills community and the families that lived and worked here. We have applied for a small grant through the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) to help research these family histories.



The small lot encompassing the dam and millpond was separated from the rest of the mill property many years ago, although the maintenance and easement rights to the dam and millrace were retained by the mill property owner. This area had been surveyed in 1930 as the "Fall Mills Water Power Property," so we felt that it was imperative to re-secure this land to insure the integrity of the site for future generations. With the purchase came 1,500 boxwood shrubs that had been planted about four years ago, so we now need to determine what to do to cultivate and/or dispose of these plants. We were considering an adoption program among members and friends so that when digging time rolls around, they can claim their boxwoods.

ROUGH WEATHER

As we compose this newsletter, staring out the window at the waterfall and much snow on the ground, we are relieved that we have had no significant plumbing problems during this rare cold snap. We had a 5-inch snow Sunday and Monday, January 14-15, then the temperature dropped to 5 below zero Tuesday night and Wednesday morning. Now it is Friday and the snow has still not completely melted, and our lane is a sheet of ice. After two more extremely cold nights, we are anticipating some warmer (though rainy) days next week. It has been about 28 degrees inside the mill building, so we have not stayed in there very long.

FLOORING WORK IN MILL

Last summer Janie noticed that the floor in the mill was sagging as you walked toward the back door to the water wheel deck. John went into the basement and discovered several deteriorating floor beams, so he hired John Bush's crew for help in replacing them with pressure treated 6 x 6 timbers. This was not an easy task, since access was difficult and working conditions were cramped. We had to purchase several screw jacks to lift the floor and secure the new beams. This was accomplished in early August.



INCREASE IN ADMISSION CHARGES AND MEMBERSHIP FEES

With the rising costs of maintenance and repair work, we have realized that our admission and membership fees need to be increased. These have been fixed for many years, and our visitors keep telling us we are not charging enough for the experience at the mill and museum. We plan to increase the admission to \$7 for adults, \$6 for seniors and military, and \$5 for children beginning in April. We also plan to change the museum membership to \$35 for the year. Compared to other attractions in the area, we feel that these are still reasonable charges.

BOOK SALES

Sales of our recently updated book on the history of Falls Mill, entitled *Falls Mill: A Legacy of Power and Industry*, have been very good. The companion book on the acquisition and restoration of our textile machinery collection has been slower to sell, as we anticipated. Sales support the museum projects.

DONATIONS

In addition to monetary donations received, the museum acquired several artifacts donated by friends and members since the last newsletter was printed. Andy Knapper of Belvidere donated a McCormick Deering cream separator that we plan to restore as an exhibit along with our collections of butter churns. Steve Walker donated several pieces of horse drawn machinery, including a reaper, two row cultivator, stalk cutter, and mowing machine. A rug loom and parts to a quilting frame were donated by Carol Ridiner of Lincoln County, Tennessee. The Fogle family donated plows and a push cultivator from the estate of Val and Mary Jo Fogle of Huntsville.

CRETORS POPCORN WAGON

About two years ago our friend Walter Clement and I were discussing his popcorn and peanut wagon lying in pieces in his shop. At the age of 85, he said he doubted he would complete the restoration of the machine. When he said our museum could have it, I told him I would wait for an appropriate time to move it to our shop. At the end of October 2023, Walter moved to an assisted living facility in LaGrange, Georgia, near his godson Stephen Grote. Stephen advised that I should go ahead and move the wagon and parts, which I did.

I knew little about these wagons, other than the fact they were powered by a small steam engine and boiler. I soon found that the maker, Charles Cretors and Company, was still in business in Illinois, and still manufacturing popcorn equipment. When I called with the engine serial number, the old hand written sales records were consulted. I was told this machine was sold on September 22, 1910, to Louis J. Haberkorn of Chatsworth, Illinois. Walter had acquired it from a collector about 1964 while he was attending school in Chicago. He had operated it on steam power for several years at fairs and events, but only the peanut roaster (the popcorn equipment had been lost). He finally determined it needed a full scale restoration, so disassembled much of it. It remained in that condition for over 30 years until we acquired it.

After an Internet search, I located the world expert on Cretors popcorn machines, near Kansas City. He is Robert Pearson, affectionately known as "Popcorn Bob." Bob has been restoring Cretors and other popcorn/peanut equipment for more than 57 years, now assisted by his son. I sent the loose parts I had to Bob (mostly the steam and gas plumbing), and he informed me that almost none of the parts were for this particular unit. Walter had apparently picked up bits and pieces he planned to retrofit. Now I am in the process of receiving period correct parts and consultation advice from Bob as the restoration progresses. This wagon was a small street machine on bicycle type wheels, manually pulled with a tongue. The photo to the right shows it without the four glass panels (which we have) or the popcorn burner and popper, but with the peanut roaster and steam engine in place. It will be quite a showpiece when we finish it, hopefully by reopening time in April.



CAMP-YOUNTS GRANT

The museum received its nineteenth annual grant of \$2,000 from the Camp-Younts Foundation, thanks to Harold Atkinson and the other foundation board members. This grant was initiated in 2005 by the late Laurie Atkinson, Harold's uncle and longtime museum friend. Laurie helped with the grant procurement until his death August 11, 2023 at the age of 95. We continue to utilize these grants for educational programs and exhibit development.

NECROLOGY

We regret to report the deaths of eight museum members and friends since our last newsletter was printed. Laurie Atkinson of Huntsville, who died August 11, was instrumental in securing the Camp-Younts grants for our museum for many years. John had known Laurie from his consulting days in Huntsville, when Laurie was head of the Product Assurance Directorate of the U.S. Army Missile Command.

Richard (Dick) Austin of Winchester had been a museum member and supporter for three decades. Dick was an aeronautical engineer who had a 35-year career at Arnold Engineering Development Center in Tullahoma. He was also an avid sailor. Dick passed away August 14 at the age of 89.

Ray Torstensen of Winchester died August 27 at the age of 81. Ray had been employed by Boeing in Huntsville, and had much experience with the space program. He was also an accomplished artist and woodworker, building many dulcimers during his retirement. We have a pen and ink print of the mill that Ray completed and donated several years ago. He was active with the Franklin County Arts Guild. Ray lived on Tims Ford Lake, where he enjoyed boating.

Janis Lightfoot Earle, mother of Darren Earle, died September 11 at the age of 80. She was a fiber artist and homemaker. Darren and his family have been longtime friends and supporters of the museum, and have helped on several projects here.

Kyle Dugger, who began visiting Falls Mill from his home in West Tennessee when he was eleven years old, lost his mother Katrina Dugger on November 18, after a battle with cancer. The Dugger family, including Kyle and his wife Betsy, and Katrina and her husband Donald, have visited the mill many times to help with various projects and for our spring cleanup days. Katrina was only 69 years old and was a pillar in their local church in Union City, Tennessee. We extend our sympathy to this loving family.

Kathleen Schroer, a retired school teacher and wife of Bernie Schroer for 60 years, passed away November 29. Bernie and Kathleen supported the museum for many years through their donations, volunteering, and Bernie's woodworking items, which he donated for sale in our store. John had known Bernie from his earliest days at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Bernie and Kathleen, natives of Indiana, resided in Huntsville but enjoyed their cabin on Tims Ford lake near Winchester. Kathleen was 82.

On January 9, 2024, we received word that John's longtime friend Rhonda Larkin had died from cancer. John had the opportunity to visit with Rhonda and her brother David Larkin a short time before her death, here at Falls Mill. Rhonda worked for the Huntsville Police Department and then transferred to the Madison County Probate Judge's Office, where she worked for thirty-eight years as a recording secretary, assistant chief clerk, and Madison County Archivist. The Larkin family was one of the earliest to settle in Franklin County.

Also on January 9, Janie's aunt, Martha Cahill Patterson, passed away in Memphis following declining health for several years. Martha and her husband Jim were longtime museum members and supporters. Martha had a very upbeat and funny personality, and was a joy to be around. She was one of six children in Janie's dad's family.

WORK DAY SCHEDULED

Plans are to hold the Museum clean up day on Saturday, March 23rd, weather permitting. We will feed workers a hearty lunch. If you are able to join us, please arrive at 9:00 with work gloves, cleaning supplies, and yard work tools. We will spend the morning cleaning and dusting the mill and schoolhouse, trimming branches, weeds, and general clean-up on the grounds. Prior to the work day we have plans to replace the head gate at the dam. This will require getting into the creek/millrace in full wet suits, to remove the old gate and install the new one. Scheduling this repair work will be difficult as we will have to time it based on the flow of the stream as well as the weather forecast. Darren Earle has agreed to help with this.

EVENTS IN 2024

Since our group tour schedule in the spring is quite full, and we have construction work scheduled, we will limit our museum sponsored events to the summer and fall months this year. Watch for the schedule in our next newsletter. Dates will also be listed on the fallsmill.com website as they are confirmed.

CHECK YOUR MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP CARD, AND IF IT'S TIME TO RENEW, PLEASE JOIN US AT THE MUSEUM OF POWER AND INDUSTRY, INC., AT FALLS MILL FOR ANOTHER YEAR! YOUR MEMBERSHIP FEE AND ANY DONATION YOU CARE TO MAKE ARE SO IMPORTANT TO US IN CONTINUING THE WORK WE HAVE UNDERTAKEN THESE LAST 39 YEARS. THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!

INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP _____ \$35.00 PER YEAR

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE MUSEUM DONATION: _____ \$50.00 _____ \$100.00 _____ OTHER

I WOULD LIKE TO BE A PART-TIME VOLUNTEER AT FALLS MILL. CONTACT ME AT THE FOLLOWING

PHONE NUMBER TO FIND WHEN I MIGHT BE AVAILABLE: _____



Museum of Power and Industry, Inc.

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