

MILL MUSINGS

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

Volume XXVIII Number 2 July 2024



40 YEARS AT FALLS MILL

Museum Membership Picnic, Sunday, September 15th

On August 31, 1984 John and Janie Lovett signed the papers and purchased Falls Mill. 40 years later we are still developing the museum and interpreting history to our visitors and school groups. A lot has happened in the past 40 years. Log buildings have been reconstructed, property holdings have increased to almost 100 acres, and museum exhibits have been expanded to cover all 3 floors of the mill and the grounds. The bed and breakfast opened in 1989, the blacksmith shop in 2015, and the schoolhouse in 2021. The Lucas house restoration is ongoing and will bring more exhibit space.

We will be celebrating this milestone at the Museum Membership picnic on Sunday, September 15th with a covered dish luncheon. Beginning at 12:30, entertainment will be provided by Huntsville musician Gabe LaRose. Gabe's vocals and guitar playing were so well received at last year's picnic that we invited him to be with us again. Plan to bring your favorite salad, vegetable, or dessert, and we will eat about 1:00. We will provide the barbecue pork and chicken and beverages. Please r.s.v.p. by September 6th. Call or text (931) 469-7161 or email us at fallsmill@gmail.com.

FIBER DAY AT FALLS MILL SCHOOL GROUPS AND GUIDED TOURS

On Saturday, June 1st we hosted members of fiber guilds from Lawrenceburg and Shelbyville to demonstrate their skills spinning, knitting, and crocheting. Multiple fleeces were provided by Diane Carrick. Diane and John Lovett, as well as Donna Fike were running the 1882 wool picker all morning and carding fleeces all afternoon on our 200 year old wool carding machine. Gary Runyon and Eric Ledbetter were in the blacksmith shop and new volunteer Debbie Smith from Huntland, TN helped at the front desk. Although the day was cool, and a bit rainy, a good time was had by all.



Group traffic to the mill was non-stop this spring. We try to schedule groups on the days we are closed to the public and we averaged 4-5 bus loads each week from April until mid-June. The Earthscope program from the Huntsville City Schools brought 4th graders and a large number of escorting parents. One day we had 60 students and nearly 40 parents! It seems the parents enjoyed the tour as much as the children. Several other youth and church groups from the area visited as well.

BARN DEMOLITION

In the last newsletter we announced the purchase of the bordering lot that contains the dam and the remains of the large barn. The barn, which we believe was built circa 1890, was in a crumbling state and partially fallen. We asked John Bush, who was working on the Lucas house next door to the mill, to help with the barn tear down. This process took longer than anticipated. We were able to sell the hewn timbers and recover about a third of the cost of demolition. There is still some cleanup work on the site, which we hope to complete this winter after the brush dies back. A large stone wall, part of the barn foundation, was left intact for a possible feature on a future pavilion near the creek and dam.



PUBLICATIONS FEATURING FALLS MILL

Falls Mill has been included in the May issue of *Good News Exchange* magazine. The issue featured local attractions and encouraged folks to vacation in Franklin County Tennessee. The article, written by Amanda E. West with photographs by Brooke Snyder, focused on the restoration of the Lucas house next to the mill (see related article). Several photographs of the mill and waterfalls and details about the Museum and restoration plans for the Lucas House property were featured.

Peggy Hart contributed an article about the textile collection at Falls Mill to *Shuttle, Spindle and Dyepot* magazine, a publication of the Hand Weavers Guild of America. John met Peggy when he was researching the cloth shearing machine donated to our Museum by the American Textile History Museum when it closed. Peggy had a similar piece and allowed John to borrow her shear so that he could fabricate missing parts for ours.

SEARCH FOR THE ELUSIVE GREEN SALAMANDER

The Falls Mill property, now nearly 100 acres, supports habitat for a variety of wildlife, including several salamander species. John has been interested to know if the rarely observed green salamander might be found here, as it has been reported in the area around Sewanee. On May 20, at John's request, Dr. Matthew Niemiller, Associate Professor of Ecology in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, visited Falls Mill with five former and current graduate students to search for the little salamander. John accompanied them along the creek bluffs and ridge outcroppings. About five species of salamanders were found, but the elusive green salamander was not among them. Matt believed the ridge habitat could support them, but so far there has been no further evidence of their presence.

NEW VOLUNTEER DEBBIE SMITH

Now that our good friend Debbie Smith of Huntland has retired, she is helping us with visitors, primarily on Saturdays. We have known Jim and Debbie Smith for almost 40 years. Jim, an auto mechanic, has helped us several times in the past with car and truck problems. We welcome Debbie and look forward to working with her.

LUCAS HOUSE RESTORATION

A year ago on July 3 we acquired the lot bordering the mill on which the old Lucas house is located. It and the mill are the few remaining buildings left from the village of "Fall Mills". The house had been allowed to deteriorate markedly by the previous owners, so we debated whether to tear it down. Local contractor John Bush, who had completed several projects on the mill and schoolhouse, encouraged us to save the house and offered an estimate to restore it. The project looked daunting, but with the acquisition of a Capital Maintenance and Improvement Grant, administered by the Tennessee State Museum, funding became available for John and his crew to begin the work.

Since the grant limit would only cover the exterior work, we decided to stabilize the house and seek future funding for the interior rooms. Work began when the grant funds became available January 3, and was completed by the end of June. It was necessary to lift the house in several places to replace a number of rotted and termite riddled sills and floor joists. The floors had to be completely removed in three rooms. Large holes in the exterior walls, created from rain runoff and termite damage, were patched using matching weatherboard siding. The collapsing front porch roof was removed and rebuilt, and new porch joists were installed. Part of the rear roof line was re-configured to avoid future rain damage, and a new metal roof was put in place. Windows were repaired, glass was replaced where broken, and the original cords and window weights were returned to functioning condition. Doors were removed, repaired, and replaced, and exterior paint was scraped and primed. Additional tasks too numerous to mention were accomplished, and at this writing the house is undergoing the finish exterior painting.

In mid-July Dr. Maegen Rochner from the University of Louisville will perform a dendrochronology (tree ring) analysis on the house timbers. We hope this will result in a date of construction of the house, as we do not know that presently. We found shreds of old newspapers attached to the walls in an upstairs bedroom with 1915 dates. Then we later discovered pencil writing on a wall in the same bedroom with a 1903 date. Our friend Audrey E. Holder, known to us as Beth, enhanced several photographs she took of the pencil writing, allowing us to discern a name, date, and other information.

John's room by room estimate for the interior work required is almost \$100,000, so we are now working on a plan to keep going. We are first asking for volunteers with carpentry experience to help with several projects that will save money, such as installing the front porch decking and repairing the interior bead board ceilings. Second, we are initiating an "Adopt a Room" campaign (see related article). Third, we will apply for an additional grant, as the same program has been renewed for another year.



ADOPT A ROOM! AND HELP US COMPLETE THE LUCAS HOUSE

John Bush has provided a room by room estimate below for completion of the Lucas house. There is also a general estimate for an HVAC system, sheetrock, and electrical wiring. The original interior walls were thin beadboard, patched in and mismatched, since they would be covered with wallpaper. We don't feel that their condition is such that they would hold new wallpaper, so John has suggested quarter-inch sheetrock throughout the house, capable of holding future wallpaper. We are asking museum members and friends for donations that would help fund a particular room in the house. We are hoping to perform some of the work required with volunteer help to save expenses. Descriptions of the rooms or a walk-through of the house can be arranged. John's estimates follow:

Parlor (room to the left of front door entrance)	\$8,350.00
Master Bedroom (room to right of front door entrance)	6,800.00
Dining Room (between parlor and kitchen)	9,000.00
Kitchen (back of house; estimate includes cabinets and stove)	9,200.00
Small Sitting Room (behind master bedroom)	4,275.00
Well Room (originally a back porch, enclosed in 1929)	3,750.00
Bathroom (part of well room, when added unknown)	2,600.00
Upstairs Hallway and Foyer	4,950.00
Upstairs East Bedroom	3,950.00
Upstairs West Bedroom	4,975.00
Sheetrock work throughout house	9,200.00
HVAC system	15,000.00
New wiring throughout house	12,000.00
New plumbing	5,600.00
 Total	 \$99,650.00



NECROLOGY

We regret to report the deaths of three friends of the museum since our last newsletter. On May 12, Alice Jensen, formerly of Shelbyville, Tennessee, died at the age of 88. Alice was born in Berlin and lost her father during the final days of World War II, when he was drafted against his will by the German Army. Alice was a remarkable woman with many interests, chief of which was the cultivation of prize winning orchids. We knew her through her participation in the textile arts groups in the area, when she would visit the mill during our fiber events. She was always happy to share her vast knowledge of wildflowers and horticulture with anyone interested, in her distinctive German accent.

On June 17, Jim Poteet, who lived in Monteagle, Tennessee, died at the age of 85. Jim had formerly been associated with Historic Rugby and was a longtime friend of Walter Clement. Walter hosted coffee and breakfast gatherings every Wednesday at his home in Old Salem near Falls Mill, and it was here that we first met Jim. Jim was a regular attendee until Walter moved to a retirement home in LaGrange, Georgia, and the breakfast group disbanded.

Our longtime friend and museum supporter Dixie Hickey passed away on June 20, following a brief illness. Dixie and her husband Bob were married almost 65 years. They were frequent visitors to the mill and attended our annual museum members picnics, where Bob became our regular photographer. Dixie enjoyed a remarkable career as a teacher and in retirement as a volunteer at the Beechcraft Heritage Museum in Tullahoma.

DONATIONS

Our friend Emily Watson, who moved to a retirement facility in Maryville, Tennessee, donated her golf cart named "Bella" to us. Now we are a "two golf cart" family.

Following the death of our friend Rhonda Larkin, her son and brother were kind enough to donate two items that had been in their family for many years. The first is a very ornate parlor or reed organ made in 1897 and purchased by the family when it was newly made. John Morris and his son Abraham helped John move the organ from the home of John Hunt, Rhonda's son, in Huntsville to Falls Mill. The other item is a rare type of spinning wheel donated by Rhonda's brother David Larkin. The wheel, known fancifully as a "moon over spoon" variety, came into the Larkin family in the nineteenth century and is probably more than 200 years old. It is missing the spindle assembly, where the yarn was spun, but Carole Runyon gave us an old spindle mechanism she obtained from another fiber arts friend, "Cricket" Bledsoe, that we plan to use to return the wheel to operating condition.

A circa 1902 depot bench was donated by Sarah Zimmerman. The bench was used in the Pontotoc, Mississippi, railroad depot for many years. It is interesting in that it still has a faint advertising slogan on the back, which says "Selz Shoes Make Your Feet Feel Glad."

In May we were donated two water turbines that resided in the Virginia Tech Hydraulics Laboratory until it was dismantled in the 1990s. One is a Pelton wheel and the other is a Francis type turbine. They were donated by David Shelor of Virginia and delivered by two of his friends.

We recently received a packet in the mail from our friend Christine Hopkins of Winchester, Tennessee. Christine had been sorting through some family memorabilia and found a few items related to Falls Mill. She sent several newspaper articles from the 1970s featuring Falls Mill, as well as a letter from 1902 postmarked with the "Fall Mills" post office stamp. The post office existed here from 1888 until 1906.

Finally, museum member Bill Friday donated \$1,525 to our museum as a result of dissolution of his non-profit Gin Spinner Revival organization. John had helped Bill develop a modern prototype of a very old machine known as a plantation or gin spinner. Bill was instrumental in helping our museum acquire an original gin spinner as a gift from Traveller's Rest Museum in Nashville.

Several friends and museum members have made monetary donations, for which we are always grateful. This past year has witnessed some major expenditures in our museum budget, so we appreciate any and all gifts.

CONTINUED WORK ON THE POPCORN WAGON

John is continuing to restore the 1910 Cretors steam powered peanut and popcorn wagon donated by Walter Clement. He is working closely with Bob Pearson of Olathe, Kansas, the premier expert on these types of machines. Bob is 87 years old and has been restoring various Cretors and similar devices for many decades. Work slowed during the winter when eastern Kansas experienced sub-zero weather and snowstorms, restricting Bob and his son to trying to keep their furnaces going and not being able to work in the shop. He is now back to full time work, and is shipping necessary parts to us as he can build them.

The wagon was in a state of disrepair when we acquired it, having been partially dismantled and missing numerous parts. Walter had last operated it over 30 years ago. The steam engine is in good condition, so most of John's challenge has involved the gas and steam plumbing, the wagon parts, and cosmetic work. The popcorn apparatus was for the most part missing, so Bob had to fabricate a new burner and other parts for us. We are also awaiting the top frame for the canopy. The original unit had a canvas canopy with a carnival look. Our good friend and museum supporter Kyle Dugger of Troy, Tennessee, has agreed to weave the canopy design that closely approximates the original pattern.

MOVIE FILMING AT FALLS MILL

A few weeks ago we were contacted by Mirror Image Productions of North Alabama, inquiring about location filming at Falls Mill for their latest movie *Dark Entities, The Reawakening*. This is a sequel to the first production *Dark Entities*, a suspense thriller set in an old house inherited by three siblings. Several of the cast members have returned for the sequel. The series has been written and directed by Brandon McLemore, with cinematography and production design by his parents Warren and Tina McLemore. The McLemores booked our B & B cabin for the nights of July 1 and 2, and the filming took place on Tuesday, July 2. Most of the actors and additional production staff drove up from the Huntsville/Decatur area that morning. Several scenes were filmed below the mill with the water wheel turning, and others were filmed on the front porch of the log schoolhouse. We met some of the actors, including Angela Russell Moore and Fred Holland, both from the Decatur, Alabama, area. The first film, *Dark Entities*, is available on Roku and several other streaming channels.

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 40 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.

134 Falls Mill Rd.

Belvidere, TN 37306