

# MILL MUSINGS

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

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## MAJOR DONATIONS FROM THE HORN FAMILY AND WINDGATE FOUNDATION

On August 1, 2025, The Museum of Power and Industry at Falls Mill received an unsolicited donation of \$25,000 from the John C. Horn Revocable Trust (John and Robyn Horn) of Little Rock, Arkansas. This is the largest individual donation we have ever received. John informed us that the Windgate Foundation, also of Little Rock, would match his donation, so on September 2 we received the matching \$25,000. John and Robyn had helped us replace the roof on the mill in 2022, with a contribution to the roofing fund campaign of \$20,000. John Horn has pursued a career in printing and amassed one of the largest collections of antique printing equipment and type fonts in the United States. His wife Robyn attended Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, the same years as John Lovett, and graduated in 1973 with a degree in Art. She is a nationally recognized sculptor. John Lovett has known John Horn for many years as a result of their common interest in letterpress printing. John Horn has recently donated the foot pedal and connecting rod for a 7 x 11 inch size Chandler and Price printing press made in 1909, donated to our museum by Kyle and Betsy Dugger of Troy, Tennessee. This is a scarce size for this make of press, so finding parts is a challenge. John Horn has just ordered new ink rollers for the press. This latest donation will bring the press back to operational condition. It may be possible to transport the press to events in the area and demonstrate antique printing methods. Our museum is very grateful for these generous gifts, and for the continued interest and support of John and Robyn.

## UPDATE ON THE LUCAS HOUSE REHABILITATION PROJECT

Funds for the third grant in support of the Lucas house rehabilitation became available in December, so our contractor All Things Home Renovations (owner John Bush) began interior work on the house shortly thereafter. This third grant differs from the first two in that it is administered through the Tennessee Historical Commission with federal funds, and is a matching grant. As a result, the granting agency pays \$40,000 and our museum has to match \$20,000 in museum payments and/or in-kind donations of labor and materials. John Lovett has been working on door repair and replacement in the house for several weeks as a part of this donated time. The interior doors had to be removed when the house was jacked up and leveled, and to facilitate the blown insulation in the walls. Needless to say, the doors did not fit well after these tasks, so had to be planed in most cases. While this was being accomplished, John cleaned the doors and began priming them. The hardware had several coats of paint, so all was removed, cleaned, and replaced, and the old mortise and rim locks were again made operable. This is an ongoing project.



*Ceiling Repair Lucas House*

Meanwhile, John Bush's contracting company began repairing damaged ceilings in several rooms, then replacing salvaged beadboard on the walls. The museum engaged the services of Jean Dunbar of Historic Designs Inc. in Virginia, to help date the house from its architectural features. She also is advising on period wallpaper, floor, and ceiling elements. She believes the Lucas house dates between 1885 and 1895 roughly, which seems to support our earlier conjecture.

Much Victorian and Edwardian period furniture has been donated for use in the house, and is currently stored in two rooms. These pieces have come primarily from a museum member in Sewanee, Walter Clement (now of

LaGrange, Georgia), and Wanda and Dusty Parker of New Hope, Alabama. A rare Hunzinger rocking chair was donated by Melissa Williams of Monteagle, Tennessee.

John Lovett has been researching the history of the past owners associated with the Lucas house, namely the Lucas and Keith families. There is a possibility that an earlier family, the Rachielles, occupied the house before the Lucas family moved in. The Rachielles were a family of French descent who came to Falls Mill in the 1870s to supervise the yarn spinning operation in the factory. There is reference to the fact that they “lived next to the factory,” but of course we don’t know for sure whether that refers to the Lucas house itself. The penciled name on the upper bedroom wall, Maud Taylor, with date September 13, 1903, has also been researched with interesting historical results. One of her descendants, Cynthia Young, is principal of Cowan Elementary School in Cowan, Tennessee. Anyone else who may have information on these families is encouraged to contact us.

## GRANT AWARD FOR FALLS MILL

The museum was again successful in its application for a Capital Maintenance and Improvements Grant, this time for needed repair work on the mill building and appurtenances. These grants have been administered by the Tennessee State Museum, and were the first two that provided funding for the Lucas house project. Funds for this grant are expected to be released soon. The grant amount this time was \$20,000. We plan to utilize the funds to pay for removal of the large poplar tree threatening the rear of the mill building, the rebuilding of the wooden flume and observation deck (also at the back), and for various maintenance tasks on the building.

## WORK ON THE WATER WHEEL AND SUPPORT PIER



*Pointing Mortar on Water Wheel Pier*

The museum has begun necessary work on replacing some of the segment gearing on the water wheel, and re-pointing with mortar the wheel’s outward supporting pier. These tasks are being funded by the museum budget, irrespective of the above mentioned grant award. On the last day the mill was open, November 29, 2025, John noticed a clunking sound when the water wheel was started. It was found that one of the 16 segment gear sections was jumping mesh with the pinion gear, due to excessive wear. For safety reasons, we did not run the wheel that last day. John Bush, contractor on the Lucas house and several mill projects, told us he could help replace some of the gears the week beginning January 5. We had five new segments already lying near the bottom of the wheel, cast by the Cattail Foundry in Pennsylvania, several years ago. This is a very labor intensive job, requiring removal of an old gear segment, lifting the new one into place with a chain hoist hanging from the wheel axle, then drilling eight bolt holes through the cast iron segment flanges in line with the previous hole configuration. The drilling is the most grueling part of the work, as it requires very sharp bits and considerable pressure, not easily managed with a hand held electric drill. We work at the bottom of the wheel, in a somewhat confined space, to accomplish this.

Each segment weighs 210 pounds. John Lovett has had to do this occasionally since the early 1990s. He and John Bush were able to attach three segments in three days, while the weather was unseasonably warm and cooperative. Museum member Darren Earle helped on one day, while Janie provided lunch for us. We are contacting the Amish foundry in Pennsylvania for additional gear castings as soon as they can provide them.

While this was going on, two of John Bush’s crew, Damon and Willard, were working on the large stone pier that supports the outer axle bearing for the water wheel. English ivy had completely covered the pier, and through the years the old mortar had eroded from the stacked stone. Some small stones had also fallen out. We were concerned about the structural integrity of the pier, knowing that its collapse would mark the end of the water wheel. The pier is 16 feet high and contains some massive stones that we believe were a result of the blasting that took place when the bluff was made ready for the current water wheel installation in 1906. Roots from the ivy and other plant growth was penetrating the pier and causing further loosening of the remaining mortar. Damon and Willard spent the first day (January 5) removing the ivy and setting up scaffolding for the mortar work. 42 80-pound bags of premixed mortar were bought from Alley-Cassetty Brick and Stone in Decherd, Tennessee, and backed down to the stone steps below the mill.



*Installing Water Wheel Gear Segment*

Then a method for getting the mortar bags across the creek to the pier had to be thought out. John Lovett had his small family fishing boat, the Memphis Belle, in the barn on the farm. His dad had bought the boat in the mid-1950s. We brought it down, tied a long cord to each end, and found that it could carry two bags of mortar through the creek to the water wheel pier without seriously dragging bottom. We pulled it with the cords back and forth. It turned out that two bags were about all that could be mixed and used up in a day. Damon completed pointing the north side of the pier and was working on the west side when rain began to threaten at the end of the week. This is another ongoing project.

## WHEELER AND WILSON SEWING MACHINE

We reported in the last newsletter about restoration work on an 1868 Wheeler and Wilson Model 3 sewing machine. The machine has been completely restored, thanks to the help of woodworker Tony Murphy, who used the walnut donated by Darren Earle to rout the edge of the top and finish it with stains that gave it an aged appearance. The machine itself was found on the Internet, the stand being donated earlier by Andrew Parsons. Some restoration was required on the machine, and pin striping to duplicate the original art work on the machine was accomplished by artist Kristin Abraham of the Abraham Art Gallery in Winchester, Tennessee. This machine requires a unique curved needle and bobbin arrangement, different from any other antique sewing machine. Therefore, the needles and bobbins are scarce and rarely appear for sale. To date, John has been able to acquire two bobbins and eight needles. He hopes to be able to duplicate the original needles by modifying modern ones, but this experiment is yet to happen. A friend of the museum, Keren Cross, of Lawrence County, Tennessee, is an antique sewing machine collector with a similar Wheeler and Wilson machine that is operational. She will soon be coming over to help with our machine.



*1868 Wheeler and Wilson  
Sewing Machine*

## PRATT COTTON GIN



*1887 Pratt Cotton Gin*

The museum's Pratt cotton gin has resided here since 1993, when the Monroe County (Alabama) Heritage Museum asked us to house it until they had exhibit space for it. It had been donated from descendants of the local (Monroe County) Jack Finklea family, having possibly been bought by Finklea in 1887, when Daniel Pratt Gin Company records show that it was manufactured. 23 years later, the Pratt gin was still here, with no contact from the Heritage Museum. I wrote them asking if they would donate the gin to our museum, and received a response that no one associated with the museum had any recollection of the gin. As a result, they donated it to our museum in August, 2016. After trips to Prattville, Alabama, where the gin was made, and to South Carolina to visit a gin enthusiast, Kevin Harbin (who has a similar machine), John began work restoring the little gin. After about a year, the gin was complete with a condenser attachment and a wagon to carry it. Then it sat in the barn for another eight years while attention was focused on the acquisition and restoration of vintage textile equipment for the museum.

This winter John decided it was time to add the flat belt drive shaft necessary to run the gin from either the museum's John Deere 520 tractor or its 1916 Witte one-cylinder gasoline engine. This work was finished by the end of December. Now we must return the John Deere tractor to operating condition so a power source for the gin will be available. Hopefully tractor repair shop owner Alfred Beachy can help with this.

## BURKE MILLING MACHINE

Many years ago an incomplete Burke Model 4 milling machine was given to the museum. At the time, John searched unsuccessfully for missing parts, and shelved the project. After seeing the machine rusting in the blacksmith shop, he finally decided to try again and see if he could bring the machine to operating condition. Occasionally the need for removing metal with a milling machine arises, so the little table top Burke may be useful. Again an Internet search was undertaken, and this time it proved fruitful. With a major part discovered and another machined by John on the old Pratt and Whitney metal lathe, the little mill was ready for a roll around

stand and a motor drive. The motor was already available from the museum's collection, as well as the V belt pulleys for the shafts necessary to reduce speed to the mill from the motor. Cutters and an operating manual were acquired on eBay, so that the milling machine is now ready to try out. It was probably made in the 1940s or 50s by the Burke Machine Tool Company of Conneaut, Ohio.

## ANTIQUE WASHING MACHINE

In early September 2025, Mr. Paul Crecraft of Huntland, Tennessee, called to say his church had an antique washing machine they wanted to donate to our museum. We already had a collection of laundry related artifacts on display in the country store, so we thought this would be an interesting addition. The Huntland Baptist Church had been given the machine for its flea market sale, but there seemed to be little interest in the device. John met Mr. Crecraft at the church, and with help they loaded the machine on a flatbed trailer. When the machine arrived at Falls Mill, further examination revealed it was made around 1920 by the Buckeye Churn Company of Sidney, Ohio. It seemed to be complete with wringer except for an electric motor, needing only cleaning, de-rusting, and "limbering up." The museum already had a vintage motor that would fit.



*Prima Domestic Laundry Machine*

The machine was the Prima Domestic Laundry Machine Model SC. John found photos of a similar one fully restored on the Internet, and this led him to the premiere washing machine collector, Mr. Lee Maxwell of Eaton, Colorado. John called Mr. Maxwell on September 13, 2025, and talked for nearly an hour about old washing machines. Mr. Maxwell is 95 years old and still actively collecting and restoring. He said he had over 1,800 antique washing machines in two large warehouses. He said about 800 were awaiting restoration. He had the restored Prima machine John saw on the Internet, and was able to provide information and advice on restoring and operating the machine. This is a future project. If anyone has interest, please contact us.

## PICNICS AND VINTAGE TOOL COLLECTIONS

Our annual museum members picnic was September 14, 2025. We hosted about 85 members, and enjoyed once again the music of entertainer Gabe Larose of Huntsville. The Lucas house was open for tours, to show members what had been accomplished and what needed to be done for the interior. More than \$5,000 was raised in donations as a result of the picnic. Mark Thompson, longtime friend and museum member who attended the picnic with his wife Lena, donated a collection of farm tools belonging to his grandfather in Maine.

The Tennessee Valley Woodworkers Club again had their annual picnic at Falls Mill, October 11, 2025. Club member Richard Gulley presented the museum with a collection of antique tools, most of which had belonged to the late Henry Davis, one of our museum members. The collection included a complete set of hand planes (mostly Stanley) of all sizes, as well as numerous auger drill bits, large chisels, and various other tools. The museum's newly restored Universal Woodworking Machine was demonstrated.



*Some Cars of the Smoky Mountain Model T Club*

On Friday, August 15, we hosted the Alabama Farm Bureau group picnic, and provided tours of the mill and grounds. This was coordinated by Krislyn "K.K." Robinson. On October 25, Chrissa "Cricket" Bledsoe brought her fiber arts group to the mill. The Smoky Mountain Model T Ford Car Club toured the mill on November 6.

## DAR AWARD

The General James Winchester Chapter of the National Society of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) held a luncheon at Falls Mill on October 15, 2025. Chapter Regent Jessica Neese presented Janie and John Lovett an honorary certificate and pin for their historic preservation efforts over 41 years at Falls Mill. We are very grateful to the DAR chapter for this award.

## **2025 SPOOM CONFERENCE**

The Society for the Preservation of Old Mills (SPOOM) held its annual conference at Monticello, Kentucky, hosted by John Childers and the Mill Springs Mill Park, owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Because John Childers was diagnosed with cancer as he was planning the conference, John and Janie Lovett stepped in to help with the coordination. They also met historic millwright Ben Hassett and Kyle Dugger at Mill Springs Mill several weeks before the conference to undertake repair work on the millstones. The conference was a two-day event this time, and included visits to three old mills. Good friend Amy Boyce, also an historic millwright and timber framer from Massachusetts, came down early to visit us and rode with us to the conference. Tragically, our friend John Childers died at age 65 about two and a half months after the conference. John was a native of Kentucky, and an accomplished weaver as well as grain miller. He also had careers as a florist and health care provider before becoming the miller at Mill Springs Mill.

## **SPECIAL DONATIONS**

Over 100 museum members gave monetary donations ranging from \$50 to \$5,000 in 2025. In addition, there were several items of note given since the last newsletter. These include a handmade quilt for the Lucas house donated by Carolyn Jones, a bench made by Buck Robinson from wood salvaged from the old Lexie Church, a collection of printing press type plates from Don Oden, and a rare "shooting stick" from Kyle and Betsy Dugger. Now this shooting stick needs a little explanation, since it is not a gun. It is an iron tool that was once used to lock printer's type into the chase, or type frame. Prior to this the tool was wooden, as were the wedges, or quoins (pronounced coins), used to lock the type. The tool was rapped with a mallet to secure the quoins. The expression "to coin a phrase" supposedly comes from this use.

## **FRIENDS WHO HAVE LEFT US**

As with each newsletter, we regret the loss of friends, and since the last newsletter, eight have died, including John Childers mentioned above. Jim Allely was among the first we heard about. He and his wife Linda, from Somerville, Alabama, have been friends for many years. Jim brought us a few sprigs of bamboo to plant as a screen, and now it has spread dramatically. Wayne Alderman of Dalton, Georgia, passed away July 23. His wife Judy was a founder of the Prater's Mill Foundation near Dalton. That organization sponsors the Prater's Mill Arts and Crafts Fair each October. Wayne and Judy were among the first "mill people" we met in the early 1980s, when we began negotiating for the purchase of Falls Mill. Janie's uncle Joe Thweatt of Brandon, Mississippi, died at age 78 on August 4. His widow Alice is Janie's last aunt on her father's side. We were saddened to learn several months later that Theresa Price of Ethridge, Tennessee, had died on February 2, 2025. She and her husband Cecil had been regular visitors and friends for many years. Cecil used to help us cook sorghum syrup, and his ancestors worked in Falls Mill when it was a textile factory. Longtime friend and museum supporter Lois Bruner passed away at McArthur Manor in Manchester, Tennessee, December 15, while her daughter Cindie and Janie and John Lovett were at her side. She had recently turned 93. Lois and her late husband John had bought Bruner Farms in Gunn Hollow, only a couple of miles from Falls Mill, about the same time Janie and John were buying the mill property. We have been fortunate to know four generations of this special family. A textile arts friend, Mary Margaret Hayden of Beechgrove, Tennessee, passed away September 2 at age 72. She had retired from a career in nursing. Finally, a friend and former museum member, John Russell Wright of Belvidere, died on Christmas day at age 66. John was a contractor and antique machinery enthusiast, as well as an active Civil War reenactor. We extend our sympathy to the families of these many friends.

## **TEXTILE BOBBIN COLLECTION**

A large collection of industrial textile bobbins, spools, and shuttles has been offered to the museum by Mr. Charles Gonce of Nashville, Tennessee. Mr. Gonce spent decades amassing over 600 such items, finding most in antique shops. When the majority of textile factories closed in the United States, hordes of these wooden articles found their way into private collections or shops, where they were converted to candlesticks, lamp stands, and other curiosities. We are planning to pick up the collection this winter while we are closed. John told Mr. Gonce he could bring his pickup to load the boxes. Mr. Gonce remarked, "You'll need more than that!"

## WORKDAY AT FALLS MILL

*As is our custom, we are planning a workday at the mill on Saturday, March 14 (rain day March 21), to help prepare the mill and grounds for the new visitor season beginning April 2. We are again asking for volunteers to help with the effort. If you would like to participate, please bring work gloves and work clothes and RSVP by March 10th so that Janie will know how much lunch to prepare. Thank you very much for your assistance.*

## LUCAS HOUSE MATCHING GRANT

The present grant we have received for the Lucas house interior rehabilitation requires a match by the museum of \$20,000. This can either be in museum funds or in-kind services, such as donations of time or materials. If any of you would like to volunteer time to help on the project, please let us know. Carpentry skills are useful but not necessary. We have to clean and paint doors, attach beadboard to the walls, nail down new oak flooring in several rooms, move donated furniture from one room to another to allow work to proceed without damage to the furniture, move and install bathroom fixtures, etc. This work must be coordinated with the contractor's schedule so that we are not in the way, or jumping ahead of the sequence of work. At a future date, we need to install bookshelves in the upper west bedroom to be used to house the museum's library collections. If any of you have sheetrock finishing skills, those can be helpful after the sheetrock is installed in rooms that will have wallpaper.

In the near future, we are needing about 300 square feet of new beadboard for the ceiling of the sunroom and bathroom. These are the tongue and groove beadboard strips about 4 inches wide, not the 4 x 8 foot beadboard panels. If you know of a source or would like to contribute to the cost of this material, please get in touch.

Thank you for all your support and encouragement.

**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 41+ YEARS. THANKS FOR YOUR HELP!**

INDIVIDUAL/FAMILY MUSEUM MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_\_\_ \$35.00 PER YEAR

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



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