



NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF THE MILL

Summer 2023

“complicated gadgets performing simple tasks”

2023 Summer Hours

Wed-Sat 10 - 5

Sun 12 - 5

May be closed for extreme weather

Friends meetings
2nd Saturday
9 AM during
summer. At the
Muscatine County
Extension Office.

Check Web page
or Facebook for
more information.

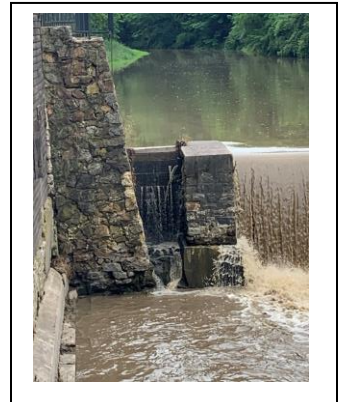
NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Tom Hanifan, President

Water wheel mystery solved

In the last newsletter we asked for help confirming the legend that there was once a water wheel on the outside of the mill. The slot in the dam looks like a wheel was once there. But it is actually a place for logs to control the depth of water behind the dam. I recently found a 2010 email from former Park ranger Ken Hyman. Ken founded Friends of the Mill.

“There apparently was a waterwheel on the mill at one time! The Park Ranger at Wildcat Den from 1952 to 1961 was Herman Ripperger. His daughter, Sharon, toured the mill on Heritage Day (a few years ago). Sharon grew up in the Park and reports that when Heman came to the park in 1952 the dam was washed out. Herman was adamant that when the dam was rebuilt that it have a waterwheel, so when the dam was rebuilt in about 1954 it did have a non-functional water wheel. Within 2 weeks of the completion of the installation of the waterwheel there was a heavy rain and the waterwheel washed out. She has no photo of the waterwheel.”



Spreading the word

Wildcat Den State Park has received 2 honors recently. [Travel Iowa](#) magazine lists the park 5th on their list of 16 “Incredible Secrets Iowa is Ready to Share”. The Iowa Department of Natural Resources staff picked the park as one of the top 3 “Hidden Gems” state parks.

Your President appeared on the “Paula Sands Live” show on the Quad Cities NBC affiliate.

On June 19th and 20th YouTube influencers Jim and Renee Viebrock visited the mill to do a piece on the mill. See the separate article about it.

Representatives from Graue Mill and Museum in Oak Brook, Illinois visited to see what we have accomplished and what we do

Internet has come to the 1848 mill

Thanks to mill volunteers Jim Strickland and Chuck Pappas, visitors can now use their phones inside the mill. It has long been the hope that we could provide visitors with Internet and cell phone service. It will help to promote the mill. It also allows us to accept credit cards for sales.

NOTES FROM PRESIDENT continued

Expanded Hours

This summer Friends are trying longer hours for visitors. It is now open 10 AM to 5 PM Wednesday thru Saturday and noon to 5 PM on Sunday. It has really paid off. Visitations have increased by 29%

New Vice President

Chuck Pappas is the new VP for Restoration and Preservation. He moved to Muscatine in 2020 and is a retired Air Force officer.

Melpine School

Friends of Melpine School has folded. Their remaining funds have been used for interior painting and repairs of the school. It remains open occasionally but often without an interpreter, and with limited access to the actual historic items.

DNR News

DNR's District Supervisor Tom Basten recently retired. Friends of the Mill were fortunate that Tom was a strong supporter of our efforts and a resource when we needed him. He will be missed.

Ron Moore has replaced Tom. He is an experienced DNR staffer and we look forward to working with Ron. Katie Green will be the DNR interpreter this summer. In addition to interpreting the park she will interpret Melpine School and the mill as needed.

Park staff member Karri Ruttenbeck has taken a job at parks in another part of Eastern Iowa. We will really miss her "can do" attitude and willingness to help.

Ron Moore informed us that The Department of Natural Resources is developing a long range capital improvement plan. Repairing the dam to reduce destructive water leaks (estimated cost \$200,000) and repairing the bridge are under discussion. They are very costly projects. There is a competitive process for determining which state-wide projects will be funded.

Original member Gladys Mittman (87) has passed away

We were very fortunate to have had her as an active member of Friends. Gladys was an initial member of Friends of the Mill. She helped for many years with school field trips and as treasurer.

Come to a meeting

We invite you to come to a meeting to find out what we do and to meet the volunteers and Park staff. We meet at the Muscatine County Extension Office at 9 AM on the 2nd Saturday in the summer, and some months in the fall. Check our Facebook page for more information.

NOTES ABOUT RETORATION & PRESERVATION

By Chuck Pappas, Vice President

Since May 2023, after having several hundred board feet of rustic white oak delivered to my furniture making shop, I've been going through the process of measuring and building a set of shutters for each of the mill's 38 windows. Due to settling and aging of the Mill, each window requires a custom-built set of



shutters. As part of my position as FOM's Vice President of Restoration and Preservation, I am donating my time, tools and furniture making shop and anticipate putting in 210+ hours to complete this project. Thanks to our friend Curt Canada at River City Hardwoods in Muscatine, Iowa, for working with FOM and the DNR to craft a great deal on the 1-inch-thick rustic white oak. Funds were made available to purchase the oak using Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) funds. You may find out more about REAP funds by visiting: <https://www.iowadnr.gov/conservation/reap>.

My method of construction utilizes no mechanical fasteners (such as carriage bolts) to construct each shutter. Instead, I use dowels and biscuits for alignment as well as waterproof glue to bind the boards together for a long happy life. Each shutter receives a bevel on the top and bottom to shed water and to align with the angle of the windowsill. In the windows which have two shutters, I place a slight back bevel on each where the shutters close together for an even better fit. Each shutter then receives a bracket holder to allow the shutters to close flush with the façade of the Mill. Oftentimes in the past and present, the open shutters would slam shut if the wind blew from a particular direction. I've been able to stop the shutters from slamming shut by installing a smaller bracket low on the inside face of the shutters so when the shutter is open, we place a thin white oak board stretched between the brackets to keep the shutter open.

Each shutter is then stained using the same stain used on the exterior of the Mill. Since the Mill is clad in softwood and the shutters are made from hardwood, there will be a period where the shutters will appear a different color than the body of the Mill. Over time, the white oak shutters will blend with each façade of the Mill.

Once stained, each shutter will be paired with the existing shutter, and I transfer the current location of the strap hinge to the newly built shutter to ensure proper alignment of the strap hinges to ease the reinstallation. I cannot reutilize almost all 120+ strap hinges due to deterioration caused by the environment and by the bats who reside in the window bays. Thanks goes out to Mark Mays for replicating strap hinges for four of the windows in the Mill. The remaining strap hinges are being fabricated at Lewis Industrial Services, Inc. in Muscatine. The DNR was gracious enough to use the remaining REAP funds to purchase the strap hinges. I look to get started installing the strap hinges on the shutters during mid to late-July 2023.

With some of the scrap wood left over from the construction of the shutters, I have constructed three new benches for visitors to the Mill. I've also constructed a freestanding counter to house our three mini refrigerators and give the interpretation staff more room to work and store personal items.

I am planning to work with local electric motor experts to install a soft start to the 20hp 3 phase electric motor which powers most of the equipment at the Mill. The steam engine currently benefits from its own dedicated soft start. Timeline of the project is yet to be determined.

If you participated on the restoration crew in the past and would like to be involved again, please contact me at 618-977-3909. If you have not been involved before but would like to help, please contact me.

Why Don't We Want Bats? By Chuck Pappas

Perhaps you are asking yourself, what will happen to the bats once the new shutters are installed? The main reason the bats are our guest at the Mill is because the previous sets of shutters installed reached their end of useful life several years ago. The cupping and warping of the existing shutters have allowed the bats to make a home with us and have become a well-known attraction at the Mill. Unfortunately, as great as the bats are to view in the Spring through the Fall, they also bring some hazards to the Mill. Due to the buildup of guano in between the warped/cupped shutters and the sash, people could be at risk for contracting Histoplasmosis. Histoplasmosis is caused by a fungus that lives in places where there's a large amount of bat guano. People can get Histoplasmosis by breathing in fungal spores, and an infection could result. We want to do our best to eliminate this risk to our visitors.

To assist in gently helping our bat friends to relocate from the spaces they currently inhabit, 2-3 days before I remove the existing and reinstall the new shutters, I will perform the following steps:

1. After sunset, I will prop open the designated sets of existing shutters.
2. The shutters will remain in the open position (with the window sash closed) for 1-2 nights to discourage the bats from returning to the same spot.
3. Upon successful relocation of our bat friends, I will commence the disassembly and reinstallation of the sets of shutters.

New Millstone Display

In the month of June 2023, we were able to add to the millstone display on the left side of the west façade of the mill. Thanks to Wildcat Den State Park staff, we were able to relocate the two aging, vintage millstones to the single millstone on the west façade. After scraping away the grass and weeds along the stone wall, we placed the two millstones in line with the existing one. Now we've got a great static display for visitors to see when they enter and exit the mill.

In the future, we plan to relocate a 4-foot diameter bronze turbine to the west façade of the mill. This will happen during 2023, after we prepare a footing to securely mount the turbine. Weighing several hundred pounds, we need to make sure the turbine will sit flat and true to provide visitors with the best view of this type of equipment.



Trail Run/Walk

The Ken Hyman Memorial Wildcat Den State Park 5K Trail Run/Walk is only a few weeks away. **Saturday Sept 9th at 8 AM.** Come out to see the park in a new way. Run as fast as you can on the trails. Or just walk and have fun. You can register online at <http://getmeregistered.com/WidcatRun>. Check our Facebook page for updates. Jim Strickland is the race organizer this year.



Learning About History

We hosted 704 eager, excited, and inquisitive young faces. That's what the spring school field trips are all about. And we have fun teaching them. They have fun learning about history like the one room school, the mill, the creek, and the log cabin. They actually get to use some of the (safe) old time tools. They also take a hike to learn about nature and plants. Classes began coming in late April. Eleven school groups came from Muscatine, Wilton, Highland, West Liberty, Lone Tree and Blue Grass. Field trips take many days of staff and volunteer dedication. Thanks to Heather Shoppa, Rita Mays and the interpretation crew.

We also help Park staff with their summer day camp program. So far, 190 kids have come to the park and mill.

We thank our donors for making it possible.



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Box 1205
Muscatine, IA 52761

The Mill Will Soon Become an Internet YouTube Star



On June 19 & 20, 2023, we were honored to host Jim and Renee' Viebrock to the Mill. Jim is the content creator behind the YouTube Channel "Millin360" (<https://www.youtube.com/@millin360>). Jim is one of YouTube's foremost experts on Civil War Era Grist Mills.

Chuck originally contacted Jim in the Summer of 2022, after viewing almost all the mill videos on his channel hoping he would be interested in visiting us. He accepted our invitation, and we spent 2 days working with Jim and Renee' taking photographs and videos of the Mill. Heather Shoppa, Vice President and I took turns shooting segments with Jim—Heather focusing on the historical and social aspects of the Mill, and me providing operational and technical details. We look forward to Jim and Renee's video coming to YouTube in August 2023.

What Is This?



If you have been in the basement of the mill you can't miss the large steam engine that powered the mill. Visitors ask "what is its story?". We have heard a story but did know if it was true. Gladys Mittman had a huge collection of information about the mill. Her family gave us many documents from her collection. One was a handwritten note summarizing an article from the June 5th, 1949 Des Moines Register. "This is a Mississippi steamboat engine in the basement of Pine Creek Grist Mill. Many years ago it was found in a boat grave yard in Muscatine. The Jenny Corliss engine was first sold to a wood working factory. Later it was taken to the old mill.

A Voice From The Past

If you have been to the mill you may have seen a flood “high water” mark on the door leading to the 2nd floor. It is surprisingly high on the door. Here are 2 stories as reported from Elbert Clemens who lived in the area in the late 1800s.



The Big 1883 Flood

“I can remember as a child people telling me about the winter of 1883 when the wind blew snow into drifts and it would get so hard that horses could pull sleighs over the snow without breaking through. They would drive right over the rail fences without any trouble. There was a good deal more, I think, than a foot of snow. The two men who were in the mill the day of the flood besides Herman Huchendorf (owner of the mill), were Otto Kroeger and Mike Missel (future owner). It was told to me that they carried flour bags up to the second story all day because they were afraid of what would happen, but they were still a long way from having it all up. As the water came through it pushed out the south side of the mill and the flour was scattered all over the timber and out into the river (Mississippi). As the water came in they decided to leave the mill, it was dark and as they stepped out and were going to make it to higher ground when they were swept away. They caught themselves on the bridge. They couldn’t go west, so they went off the east end of the bridge as the west end was carried away. They walked a mile to a neighbor and stayed there overnight. Huchendorf, who stayed at the mill, became very frightened and went way to the top of the mill and they say he tore a blanket to pieces and tied himself to one of the big posts up there. Of the flour that was picked up off the ice on the river, ... the flour had formed a paste of about a half inch thickness and the rest of it was just as good as when it had been milled. Most of this information is what I heard from my dad and the neighbors in times gone by and I also checked with Mike Missel who was running the mill at the time the state took it over (1927). He also got that information from his dad who was in the flood, so I think it’s pretty accurate.”

The Kindness of Neighbors

“... the ground was frozen and covered with a foot of snow, came two days of warm thawing weather and then a heavy rain storm. The water came down Pine Creek in a volume never seen before or since... The water ...broke through the windows, ran through the mill, broke down and carried away the addition on the south side. ...The damage that was done to the mill ... wrecked Huchendorf financially, but the people of the whole community came forward with donations of money and labor and enabled him to repair the damage and continue business.”

A Personal Story of Wildcat Den from Discover Muscatine Newspaper by Phil Wiese

Imagine being a kid, riding on horseback with a group of friends down a rocky, rugged trail that runs through a neighbor's property. Along your ride, you will find prairie land full of wildflowers and native grasses and a creek that flows through a large forest with towering oaks blanketed by many different ferns over the forest floor. As you follow its banks, it leads to a timber-framed grist mill used to grind local farmers' grain into flour. You come upon a limestone cliff just a stone's throw away, and wham! A cougar jumps off the cliff onto the back of one of the horses. It spooks everyone and knocks you to the ground. Dazed, you stand back up with only a few scratches. Those few scratches become the evidence of catamounts (mountain lions, bobcats, cougars) lurking about those woods. This is now the scenic trails with large cliffs known as Wildcat Den.

Park Ranger Ben Marcus shared this fun and exciting story when I asked about the origin of Wildcat Den. Ben has overseen the park since October 2021 and enjoys sharing its rich history and interesting lore.

If you've ever wondered how the park came to be, the history books tell of two sisters, Miss Emma and Miss Clara Brandt. The sisters enjoyed the property and its rich natural resources so much that they bought 67 acres in 1905 to preserve it. Years later, the sisters donated the land. Then, the State of Iowa purchased more land adjacent to the property along with the grist mill, and in 1936, it all became known as Wildcat Den State Park.

Each year, thousands of visitors from all over the country come to hike the trails and explore the unique rock formations named by the early settlers. The Devil's Punchbowl, Steamboat Rock, and my favorite, Fat Man Squeeze (I am proud to say I have not gotten stuck in that pass yet. Ha!)



Hikers at Wildcat Den State Park

Ranger Ben and his team encourage everyone to enjoy the park's natural beauty and history. It has almost five miles of hiking trails, several picnic areas, and a primitive campground. A couple of these areas are also available for those with limited mobility. He said the best things to do at the park this time of year are to hit the trails, look out for the many prairie flowers blooming, then stop by the historic grist mill. A volunteer group, Friends of Pine Creek Grist Mill, oversees the mill. The volunteers walk you through the mill and show how early settlers ground grain into flour. Stop in to tour the mill now through September. The tour days and times are Wednesdays-Saturdays 10 a.m.-5 p.m. and Sundays noon- 5 pm. Ranger Ben is grateful for the generous volunteers who put in the hours that make operating the mill possible. Without them, the mill wouldn't be open to the public.

I'm guilty of taking the park for granted, especially since I live just down the road from Wildcat Den. I don't explore the trails nearly as often as I should. When I shared this with Ranger Ben, he mentioned how lucky we are in Iowa to have free access to our State Parks. He said many out-of-state visitors stop by the park office asking where to pay the entrance fee. Iowa is only one of three or four states without a user fee. How incredibly blessed we are!

If I could time travel, I'd like to be one of those kids riding horseback, just not the one that got knocked off by the mountain lion. I'd get spooked if one of my kitty cats jumped on me! I'd want to witness the story behind the state park in my backyard.

We have so many treasures here in our backyard in Muscatine County. Make time for yourself to get out and play!

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The generosity of donors makes it possible for us to host visitors and provide our school program. Below is a list of the donors as of the writing of the newsletter. In addition to those listed below, many people have donated important smaller amounts.

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Pine Creek Grist Mill Newsletter

An opportunity to learn about and participate in a local historic treasure

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