



The Pine Creek Grist Mill, sometime during the late 1950s.

The granddaddy of mills

■ Research indicates that the Pine Creek Grist Mill might be the oldest operating grist mill west of the Mississippi still in its original location

Cynthia Beaudette
of the Muscatine Journal

MUSCATINE, Iowa – For the past 10 years, a group of dedicated area residents have brought the 158-year-old Pine Creek Grist Mill at Wild Cat Den State Park in Muscatine into regional focus.

Now, members of the Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill have learned the mill that has captured their imagination and inspired years of restorative efforts might also have a place in the national spotlight

Tom Hanifan, president of Friends of the Pine Creek Grist Mill, said after a representative from the Iowa State Historical Society suggested his group research the national significance of the mill,

he decided to take on the project.

“One of my obsessions has been to find out if there are any older operating grist mills between the Mississippi River and the Rockies (mountains),” said Hanifan, a retired librarian for Muscatine Community College. “Thanks to the Society for the Preservation of Old Mills, SPOOM, and the “millpictures.com” Web site, I have an answer.”

Hanifan said SPOOM is comprised of people who are fans of old mills and people who are involved in the restoration and interpretation of those mills.

“This organization is the premier source of information,” said Hanifan.

Hanifan, of Muscatine, found evidence indicating that Pine Creek, built in 1848 may well be the oldest known working grist mill between the Mississippi and the Rockies that is still on its original site.

David Metz, vice-president of the Pine Creek

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BETH VAN ZANDT/MUSCATINE JOURNAL

The Pine Creek Grist Mill, as it appears today.

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Grist Mill, said this finding could be an asset in the future restoration and preservation of the mill.

“This certainly shows what a unique historical treasure the Pine Creek Grist Mill is on a regional basis as well as a local basis,” said Metz, of Muscatine. “We think it will be helpful in qualifying for grants.”

Hanifan conducted extensive research on some mills described in different historical documentation, but found little information.

“My assumption is that these mills no longer exist in operational form,” he said. “A huge problem with the SPOOM list is that critical information is not available on many mills, whether they still exist, when they were built and if they grind.”

Hanifan also used the Internet search engine, Google, and his

own materials for research.

He said there is a possibility that two mills built in Kansas in 1831 and 1847 exist, but he found very little information on those sites.

However, “Missouri is a challenge,” Hanifan said.

“MillPictures.com” lists 69 mills and many of them have no known date.”

Hanifan said an interpreter at Bolinger Mill in Missouri told him most mills in the South were destroyed during the Civil War.

“The assumption is that the undated mills were built after the war,” said Hanifan.

Hanifan said he’s seen many photos of Missouri mills in various states of deterioration during his Web search.

“Obviously those don’t work,” he said. “Some old Missouri mills worked until the last 20-30 years. Some may be operating today as feed mills.”

Jolly Mill, in Missouri, built in 1848, has some exterior restora-

Visit the Pine Creek Grist Mill Web site at:

<http://www.pinecreekgristmill.com/>

How to help

Donations for Pine Creek Grist Mill restoration and operation can be sent to:

■ Community Foundation of Greater Muscatine, 208 W. Second St., Suite 11, Muscatine, IA 52761; make checks payable to Pine Creek Grist

tion and possibly some interior work, Hanifan said. But “MillPictures.com” visited it in 2002 and it was not working at that time.

Hanifan said the best candidate for oldest working mill from the Mississippi to the Rockies is Hulston Mill in Missouri, which was built in 1840. But that mill is not on its original site. It is now in a county park and was restored to operation in 2003.

Metz, a retired wine-making consultant, is including the information about Pine Creek Grist Mill’s historical significance in

Details

Mill/Community Foundation Account; stock and in-kind donations also are accepted (all donations can be anonymous via this route); call 563-264-3863 for more information.

Or ...

■ Tom Hanifan, 1226 Vista Court, Muscatine, IA, 52761

Call Hanifan at 563-263-4818 for more information.

Donations are tax deductible.

his new book, “The Story of Pine Creek Grist Mill.” Metz began working on the book about a year ago and has four chapters to finish. He plans to have it ready for sale by the end of the summer.

The Pine Creek Grist Mill is currently closed, but Hanifan said it will open for the season from 12:30-4:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 3 and will be open to the public through September from 12:30-4:30 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday.

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